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PLUCK AND LUCK

SENT TO SIBERIA OR THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF TWO AMERICAN BOYS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY GENL. JAS. A. GORDON



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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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SENT TO SIBERIA

—OR—

The Strange Adventures of Two American Boys

By GEN. JAS. A. GORDON

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE WITH THE SEVEN FLIGHTS OF STAIRS.

As this story of the strange adventures of two American boys in the wilds of Siberia is strictly true we propose to confine ourselves to the facts, and tell it with as little embellishment as possible, for there is so much to relate that there is no room for neatly turned phrases and high flown words.

It all began one night in the month of January several years ago, before the great trans-continental railroad between Russia and Siberia was begun.

Nowadays such adventures as we are about to describe would be impossible in Russia, for convicts sent to Siberia are put on board the train, and go flying through to their destruction, reaching the remotest parts of the great Russian Empire in a matter of a few days.

Janeway & Jack's Great American Vaudevilles had made quite a hit at the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg.

Vaudeville, served up in the American style, was something new in St. Petersburg then, and crowds packed the theatre nightly.

The management was reaping a harvest, and the artists who had consented to come to Russia with fear and trembling were now only too glad that they had accepted the engagement. For a month and more a steady stream of roubles had been flowing into their pockets, and there was talk of remaining in the Czar's capital all winter, if the things continued to go on in the flourishing manner which they had during the past few weeks.

Among the most popular artists connected with the show were George Moore and Nat Franklin, contortionists, who had appeared under the name of the Zimeriri Brothers.

Both were double-jointed—born so—and in addition both had been thoroughly trained to their business, and although both were the sons of old-time professionals, the boys, whose ages were eighteen and nineteen, respectively, had not met until they came together in Janeway & Jack's company, but as they occupied the same stateroom in the voyage across the Atlantic, and had been roommates ever since, they had not only become very well acquainted, but had grown to be fast friends.

On the particular January evening mentioned, the boys, having done their second turn, and being twice encored into the bargain, left the theatre by the stage door, and started down the Gorokhovaia Oulitza, keeping on until they came to the great iron bridge across the Neva where the first of the strange train of adventures which ultimately led them into the wilds of Siberia took place.

"Say, Nat, to-night's crowd was the biggest yet," remarked George. "Why, the very aisles were packed. It's the first time they have let them stand up between the seats. I thought it was against the law."

"I understand it is," replied Nat; "but I guess the crowd was too much for the ushers, and they worked their way in, law or no law. When I was in front the crowd reached a block away from the door; but what do you say to having a little supper at Delgosky's chop-house to-night?"

"I thought you were going to stop this night supper business?"

"Well, so I am, in part. These late suppers every night have been just playing the mischief with me, but once in a while it won't harm. It's as cold as Greenland to-night, and I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"You know very well you don't have to ask me twice," laughed Nat. "I've got a reputation to sustain the matter of feeding, so I'm with you, old man; but, say, what's the matter with that girl? Is she going to commit suicide, or what? See how she is leaning over the railing! If she falls on the ice down there she will be pretty sure to crack her skull."

The girl in question stood alone at a little distance ahead of them leaning over the railing, and apparently looking down upon the ice.

She wore a long pelisse with a fur hood, which completely concealed her features, and there she stood like a statue until the boys came up to her, when she suddenly turned, and with a loud cry flung her arms about George's neck and began weeping and sobbing in a wild, hysterical fashion which scared the boy so that he did not know what to do or say.

"Good heavens! What shall I do, Nat?" he exclaimed. "Take her off! She'll strangle me! Talk to her! Say something to make her quiet. Do, for goodness sake!"

Now, Nat could speak a little Russian, for he was a studious fellow naturally, and as soon as he accepted the engagement with Janeway & Jacks he procured instruction books and went to work to study Russian. As he had kept steadily at it the language was not altogether incomprehensible to him, but when it came to talking himself that was quite another thing.

Occasionally he found a person who could understand him a little, but with the young lady in the fur pelisse he could make no headway at all.

Nor could George detach himself from her embraces without resorting to positive force.

It was very embarrassing.

There were not many persons crossing the bridge on foot, but sleighs of every description were flying past, and suddenly a large covered sleigh stopped beside the group, four men springing out and surrounding the boys.

The girl instantly recovered from her hysterics.

Disengaging herself from George, she spoke a few rapid words in Russian, pointing at him with her finger at the same time.

Instantly the boys were seized; strong hands were pressed over their mouths, and they were hustled into the sleigh.

There was not the least chance given them to say a word or do a thing, for a revolver was pressed close to the forehead of each, and they were gruffly ordered to keep still or die, which command Nat perfectly understood.

The girl followed them into the sleigh, the curtains were pulled down, while the three horses, which were attached to it, went flying over the snow.

Not a word was spoken. When Nat tried to protest the cold muzzle of the revolver was pressed against his forehead and a hand clutched him by the throat, choking him until he gagged.

Square after square was covered, corner after corner turned.

The situation of our two American boys was terrible. Visions of Nihilists, chain gangs and Siberian mines began to rise up before them. Above all things, they had been warned not to talk politics, and to keep to themselves, and they honestly tried to do so, but here was an emergency which no one could foresee.

At last the sleigh took a sudden turn, and the boys could hear two great gates slam behind them.

The sleigh stopped and the girl got out, followed by two of the men.

The two who held the revolvers now pushed the boys forward, and they were confronted by two other revolvers when they stepped upon the snow in a courtyard in front of a tall, narrow house.

It was evidently a lodging house of the meaner sort. The windows were lighted up, and there were poorly dressed people in the courtyard and pouring in and out of the door.

Nobody paid the least attention to the sleigh or its occupants.

In New York there would have been a crowd around it in an instant under similar circumstances, but it was not so here, for everyone seemed to be blind and deaf to what was going on.

The girl led the way through the open door, and George and Nat, still held close prisoners, were led after her.

The hall was dark, dirty and ill smelling, and so were the stairs up which the boys were now led.

This was one flight of stairs.

Then they went up another.

After that it was another and another still.

Four flights of stairs so far and then a pause for breath.

Three more flights followed.

Seven flights of stairs, and then another pause in total darkness.

Seven raps upon an unseen door followed, which were answered by seven from within, and a deep voice called out in Russian:

"Who comes here?"

CHAPTER II.

CAPTURED BY THE CZAR'S POLICE.

By this time George and Nat had given themselves up for lost.

Each boy had his arm clutched in a grip like iron, and although they could not see them they knew that the revolvers were still close to their heads.

Somebody answered, saying something in Russian which George could not understand, and then the door flew open and they were pulled into a good-sized room which was literally packed with men. It was so hot from a big stove and so thick with tobacco smoke that it was next to impossible to discern the faces of the staring crowd.

Not a word was spoken as the door closed behind them and the boys were led up to a small table behind which sat a man with a tremendously large mustache writing in a big book.

The room was evidently on the top floor of the house, for a large skylight opened in the ceiling through which some of the hot air and smoke escaped, or the room would have been simply untenable.

The windows were not only closed but heavy curtains hung in front of them. Some of the men smoked pipes, others puffed at cigarettes—there was scarcely anyone who was not smoking. No women were present. The girl who had been the means of the capture of George and Nat had disappeared.

For fully ten minutes the two boys stood there in front of the table. Still no one spoke, the man with the huge mustache continuing to write in the big book.

At length he closed it with a bang, and everybody bent forward expectantly, as much as to say: "It is coming now."

The man behind the table began to speak, addressing himself to George and Nat.

He spoke rapidly and with bitter and sarcastic emphasis—

so rapidly that Nat could not make out a word he said, until at last he paused, calling out:

"Speak! Answer! Are you dumb?"

Nat tried it in Russian, but it was no use.

"Is there anyone here who speaks English?" George called out then. "This is all a mistake. We can't speak Russian enough to make ourselves understood."

"It won't do," said the man behind the table, and he was going on to say more, when a man with a long, black beard got up and coming forward said in English:

"If you won't speak in Russian, speak in English. Let us hear what you have to say?"

George took it up now. In a very emphatic manner he explained who they were and what had happened.

"We don't know you," he wound up with. "It's all a mistake, as I said before. We are simply two American boys who belong to Janeway & Jacks' show, which is now performing at the Imperial Theatre. Some of you must have seen us there. We are contortionists. If you don't believe what I say we will prove it to you right now."

"Liar! Traitor! We know you well!" hissed the man with the black beard, shaking his fist in George's face. "Of course you can speak English, since you have lived in London for two years at our expense—wasting the money which ought to have been devoted to the good of the cause!"

"Why, neither of us was ever in London in our lives," declared George, emphatically. "I tell you, mister, you are all wrong. Give me a chance to prove it. We will show you that we are professional contortionists. We will do our act for you right here and now."

Upon this, the man with the black beard seeming to be somewhat impressed, turned and addressed the crowd in Russian.

A storm of protest, apparently, followed. The man behind the table produced a gavel and rapped loudly for silence, then spoke for a few moments to the bearded man—of course, nothing of what he said was understood by the boys.

The man with the black beard then addressed George in slow, measured tones, speaking again in as good English as the boy could have used himself.

"Ivan Rousky and Pietro Proona, your ruse has failed," he said. "You have lied to us, you have deceived us, you have betrayed the cause of Nihilism, and the decision of this lodge is that you shall die. It is all arranged. We have been watching for your appearance in St. Petersburg for weeks and everything is settled. No power on earth can save you from our hands. Here and now in this room you shall die, and your bodies will be thrown into the Neva through a hole cut in the ice to receive them. Such is the doom of traitors. The consolation of the church shall be denied you, but you are now given ten minutes to confess or to say your prayers, as you please. If you confess you will be shot through the heart and instantly killed. If you remain stubborn, and still persist in denying your identity, then the daggers of the brethren will do the fatal work; each brother shall have his strike at you, and each shall strike you where he can."

It is useless to deny that the boys were frightened—terribly frightened.

There were at least forty men in the room. To think of escape was simply absurd.

Nat covered his face with his hands and seemed deeply overcome, but George faced his tormentors with flashing eyes, and remained singularly cool.

"I want to say to you again that it is all a mistake," he said. "I tell you once more that we can prove every word we have said. Send for the manager of the company which is performing at the Imperial Theatre and he will identify us as George Moore and Nat Franklin. We are both Americans, and professional contortionists. We were never in England in our lives, and it might be necessary for me to tell you that we were never in St. Petersburg before."

"What you say is of no avail," was the reply. "We know that you came here with the American theatrical company. We know that you are contortionists. So were Ivan Rousky and Piero Proona. What you bring forward as proofs of your innocence are positively proofs of your guilt."

This was the time when even George's splendid courage failed him.

"It's no use, Nat," he whispered. "We are doomed."

"It looks so—it certainly looks so," replied Nat, in a broken voice. "Nothing can save us! No one will ever know what became of us! Oh, my poor mother! This will break her heart!"

"We must think quick," said George. "There is no time for

useless regrets. Shall I confess that we are the men they think us? It is better to be shot than to be hacked to pieces with knives."

"I don't know! I can't decide. It seems just horrible for a fellow to die with a lie on his lips."

All this time the man with the black beard stood apart; the Nihilists in the room had drawn their daggers and sat motionless, eyeing the youthful prisoners with malevolent glances; the man behind the table held his watch in his hand.

"Time's up!" he exclaimed, in Russian, shutting the case of his watch with a snap.

"Do you confess?" demanded the man with the black beard, stepping forward.

What George's answer might have been he was destined never to know.

Suddenly the door was burst in with a loud crash, and at the same instant the skylight opening in the roof was thrown back, and into the room a force of fully twenty of the city police came rushing with drawn revolvers, while a dozen rifles were thrust down through the skylight overhead.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE EXPERIENCES IN THE UNDERGROUND CELL.

George and Nat hailed the sudden and unexpected descent of the police upon the Nihilist lodge with joy.

They thought, and very naturally, that their troubles were all over.

How fearfully mistaken they were in this will soon be shown.

The surprise was complete, and the Nihilists were captured to a man.

Indeed, there was no attempt to show fight, and George was amazed at the spiritless way in which these plotters against the government handled themselves.

Amid a great deal of excited talking and fierce gestures, which went for nothing, the Nihilists were handcuffed two and two and marched down those seven flights of stairs.

Of course, George tried to explain matters in English, and Nat attempted the same thing in Russian, but absolutely no attention was paid to them.

They had been found with the rest, and no distinction was made.

Nat could not talk enough Russian to make himself understood, and if any of the police understood English they kept the fact bravely to themselves.

So the boys were handcuffed together and hustled off with the rest.

A great crowd followed them through the streets, but it was a silent crowd—very different from what it would have been in New York.

Nor did it follow far when they turned into a great square, which neither George nor Nat recognized as a place they had ever been in before. A band of mounted Cossacks suddenly appeared and charged upon the crowd without mercy, scattering them in all directions. Indeed, they did not wait to be scattered, for the greater part of them took to their heels and ran.

In a few moments the police rounded up their prisoners before a large, gloomy-looking stone building with heavily barred windows.

A small door was opened, and the Nihilists were marched in two and two, the others remaining out in the piercing cold until the order for the next pair to move, and there was sometimes a lapse of as much as ten minutes between the entrance of the pairs.

George and Nat, being well down the line, had to wait nearly an hour before their turn came, and as the thermometer stood below zero, they were so cold when at last they were ushered into the big building that they could scarcely speak.

But talking had not been allowed thus far.

If anyone attempted to speak he got a rap over the head with a policeman's sword. It was not until the boys found themselves facing a man in military dress, seated behind a desk in a big barn-like room, that the necessity for saying anything came.

This officer, whoever he might have been, like the head of the Nihilist lodge, was engaged in writing in a big book, and kept the boys shivering and shaking before him for a good ten minutes before he spoke.

Then when he did speak it was in Russian, and there was nobody present who understood English.

The officer grew angry when George tried to make him understand that he could not comprehend a word that was being said.

He began to think that they were "playing it on him," as Nat remarked.

Suddenly he sprang up and shouted out, angrily.

Immediately two policemen who stood guarding the boys whacked them over the head with the flat of their swords.

This did no good.

The officer grew more and more enraged, and when George wrote on a leaf of his memorandum book:

"We are Americans. We are members of the Janeway & Jacks' Theatrical Company, performing at the Imperial Theatre," he spit on the paper, and throwing it down upon the floor stamped his foot on it.

This ended the trying interview. Immediately the boys were seized and dragged through a long corridor, hurried down two flights of stone steps, and turned over to a horrible hunchback, who was so drunk that he could scarcely stand.

Jingling a huge bunch of keys in his hand, the hunchback pushed the boys before him, chuckling and showing his yellow fangs of teeth, and they advanced through several long, gloomy corridors, until at last they stopped before an iron door.

This the hunchback opened, and as he did so a mad rush of foul, heated air burst forth.

Into the darkness the boys were pushed, still handcuffed together, and the door clanging behind them they heard the key turn in the lock.

"Oh, George! This is the end! This means Siberia, sure!" groaned Nat, falling back against the slimy stone wall.

"Take it easy," was the quiet reply. "If it means Siberia, it's only the beginning, it can't be so! Someone will listen to us. Surely we shall be able to send word to Mr. Jacks, and it isn't possible that he will have any serious trouble in getting us free."

Nat, however, was inconsolable, and it took George a good ten minutes to quiet him down.

"Now, come; let's see what we can do for ourselves right here and now," he said at length. "First and foremost, what makes this infernal place so hot?"

"Well, that's something I'll never tell you," replied Nat, calmer now. "It must be over a hundred, and after half freezing to death outside there the change is terrible. I feel as though I was in a Turkish bath."

"There must be some good reason for it. Got a match, Nat?"

"Lots of them."

"Well, light one of them, and let's see what we can make out of this infernal hole. Say, I don't see the slightest necessity for such fellows as you and I standing here handcuffed any longer. It would be a pity if we couldn't work out of these bracelets, and I think we can."

Nat struck a match then. As the feeble flame flared up the boys saw that they were standing in quite a large inclosure walled up with stone on all sides. Over in one corner down close to the floor was a round hole scarcely big enough to admit the body of an ordinary sized man.

It was here that the hot air came, as the boys soon found out.

It rushed out through the opening like a blast from some fiery furnace.

The cell seemed to be growing hotter every moment, and it had been hot enough to almost roast the boys when they came in.

George now set to work on the handcuffs. It was one of his tricks to compress his hand into a remarkably small compass. He was a perfect expert at the Indian box trick. It was his boast that no committee had been able to successfully tie him up, and with Nat it was just the same.

So soon as they started out to free themselves the handcuffs had to go.

It was the tightest squeeze that George had ever had, but Nat's hand was smaller and he got it out with less difficulty.

In a moment the boys were free, and George, giving the handcuffs a kick, sent them ringing over into the furthest corner of the cell.

"That's better!" he exclaimed. "What's next, Nat?"

"Blest if I can tell you! We are in the dark here in more senses than one. I must get off some of these clothes or I shall die."

"Same here. The heat seems to come out of that hole down there by the floor. Blest if I don't think I'll crawl in there and see if it don't connect with some chimney, for while I don't propose to try to climb to the roof of the prison just yet it would be well enough to know that we could do it if we wanted to."

Nat opposed the move, but George was determined. Strip-

ping himself to his underclothes, he made Nat hold a match while he wriggled into the hole.

Few could have done it, and few would have cared to attempt it, but it was all in the line of George's business, and in spite of the intense heat he persevered.

He had brought a few matches with him, and he lit them from time to time as he advanced.

Perhaps twenty feet were covered and the stones were growing too hot to be borne, when all at once George came to the end of the opening and perceived a ruddy glow of light ahead.

One glance up and another down was all he had time for.

Above him was a wide flue, below, he found himself looking into a fiery furnace, and he pulled away in a hurry with the palms of his hands almost scorched, when all at once a hideous yell rang out behind him.

"George! George!" he could hear Nat's voice shouting, and back he crawled, wriggling along like a snake.

Again the yell was heard.

It sounded like the maddened cry of a lunatic, and George's heart beat wildly as he backed out of the opening and sprang to his feet, for now he could hear the sounds of two persons struggling in the darkness.

"George! Save me!" Nat's voice shouted again. "He's choking me to death!"

"Who is it? What is it?" cried George.

The only answer was that same demoniacal yell, and then came the sound of someone falling heavily upon the stone floor of the cell.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT THE MADMAN WHO CAME IN AND OUT.

"Double on him, Nat! Double on him! Give him the grand throw!" shouted George into the darkness, at the same time fumbling in his pockets for a match.

Now, this was stage talk. George and Nat could do almost anything in the way of bodily contortion—they were really quite wonderful in their way.

To "double" on a man meant to bend down suddenly and thrust the head between his legs. To give him the "grand throw" meant to seize hold of the man's legs while in that position, suddenly straighten up, and throw him over the head.

George and Nat could both do this. The leverage thus applied is tremendous, and a man of comparatively slight physique can easily throw a strong, heavy one if he can only get hold of him right.

Somebody had fallen in the darkness, but somebody had got up again, and once more that hideous cry rang out through the cell.

Nat did not answer George's call, and a moment later the match was found and lighted.

All was still now in the cell. George saw Nat leaning against the wall panting like a dog, his eyes starting half out of his head.

And right here the strange part of the whole business came in.

There was no one else in the cell!

"Nat! Nat!" cried George, making his way up to his chum. "What is it? Who was here? Where is he now? What is it all about?"

Nat seemed to recover himself then. As the match went out he clutched hold of George convulsively.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know!" he gasped. "I don't know who it was! It jumped on me suddenly, and got hold of my neck. I was almost strangled! Oh, has it gone? Has it gone?"

Of course it has gone. What was it? Was it a man?"

"Man or devil!"

"Devil nothing! It must have been a man, and from the way he yelled I should say he was crazy, but where in the world did he go to? How did he get in here?"

"I can't tell you anything at all about it," replied Nat. "All I know is that he jumped on me while I was listening to you. Oh, it was terrible! I shall never get over it! What shall we do if he comes again?"

"Do the best we can, of course. Why didn't you give him the grand throw?"

"I did. That's what saved me! Didn't you hear him fall?"

"I heard somebody fall. I thought it was you."

"Oh, no. He went down all right, and then he gave another yell, and that was the last of him. I haven't the least idea where he went."

"And are you hurt?"

"Not a bit. I'm going to brace up now. We must meet this

situation the best we can, of course. What did you find in the hole?"

"It leads into a big chimney, and there is a blazing furnace at the bottom of it. So under this place is red hot. I suppose that's the way they heat the cells, but I don't see how they expect a man to live in them with no ventilation. Nat, it's a terrible thing, but whatever comes to us we must keep cool."

"Of course we must. I realize that. If it was only light I could stand almost anything, but to think of being shut up here in the dark and that thing liable to jump in on us at any time—it's enough to drive me mad!"

"Perhaps he won't come again. Try to make the best of it. They can't keep us here forever. I'm going to be hopeful and try to believe that it will all come out right in the end."

Now this was all very well as far as it went, but the "madman" did come again.

About twenty minutes later, while the boys were leaning against the wall talking to each other, a shuffling sound was suddenly heard in the darkness.

It seemed to come from away over in the furthest corner of the cell.

"There's something there," whispered Nat. "I'll light a match."

"Sure," replied George; "but just wait a moment. I'm ready for him if he comes here."

All at once the same hideous yell rang out! The boys felt their blood fairly run cold.

Nat struck the match in a hurry then, and they saw advancing toward them an ugly misshapen figure all dressed in rags.

It had been a man once, of course, but it was more like an animal now, with its crooked form, tangled beard, and great shock of hair, which seemed to stand up all over its head.

The lighting of the match had a very peculiar effect on the madman, for such he undoubtedly was.

He gave a yell and, turning, ran back to the wall over in one corner.

He seemed to throw himself against the wall with terrible force, and then instantly disappeared.

"Great Scott! How terrible!" exclaimed George. "There must be a swinging door there which leads to another cell."

"That's what! But what are we ever to do with that thing liable to jump on us at any moment? If it keeps up like this I believe I shall go mad myself!"

The hours of the night dragged slowly by.

Words fail us when we attempt to describe the horrors of that awful time.

Again and again the same scene was repeated.

As many as twenty times the madman passed in and out through the swinging door at the other end of the cell.

He always gave the same yell when he came in and gave it again when he went out, as he invariably did as soon as the match was struck.

Of course this required constant watchfulness on the part of the boys, and no such thing as sleep was to be thought of.

George's fear was that the matches would become exhausted before relief came to them, but Nat still had three when a key was heard grating in the lock, and they knew that someone was coming at last.

Perhaps the madman heard the sound, too; at all events he came in through the swinging door at the same instant, announcing his presence with the same old yell.

The cell door flew back, and the hunchback entered, carrying a lantern and a basket.

By this time the madman was half way across the floor, and instead of turning back as usual, he ran toward the keeper, yelling madly, who, muttering something in Russian, put down the lantern and the basket, and drawing out a short whip of several thongs from under his blouse, threw himself upon the hideous creature and began to beat him over the head and shoulders.

For a moment the madman stood it. Snarling and snapping like an animal, he tried to dodge the whip and get hold of the throat of the hunchback, who did not seem to be a bit afraid of him, but just laid on the whip the faster, when all at once the madman with a fearful yell gave it up and retreated, bounced through the door and was gone.

This ended it. The boys saw no more of him after that.

The keeper instantly shot a bolt which secured the swinging door.

No doubt it had been left open by accident, but the boys never knew anything about it, for the man returned to his basket in silence, at the same making a sign for them to approach.

There was bread, meat, coffee and water in the basket.

Saying a few words in Russian, which Nat declared meant,

"Eat all you want to, you will soon be called," the keeper retreated, leaving the lantern behind him.

Two hours more of imprisonment followed. George's watch now showed that it was eight o'clock.

Occasionally they could hear the madman yelling in the adjoining cell, but beyond that he did not trouble them, and at last the keeper returned and told the boys to put on their clothes and follow him; never even alluding to the fact that the handcuffs were gone.

"This means another examination, I suppose," said Nat gloomily. "Well, I don't know where it will land us. This is Russia, and I fear the worst."

"Instead of that hope for the best," replied George. "They can't do anything to us. We have got letters and papers to show who we are. I shall insist upon Mr. Jacks being sent for, and once he does it will be all right."

But Nat was right and George was wrong.

This was Russia and not New York.

Here justice, as we understand the word, is a thing unknown, and in its place five words are substituted:

The will of the Czar!

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE THE JUDGES.

The boys were led by the hunchback to the end of the corridor, and there turned over to the same official who had received them the night before.

He led them in silence to a large room on the ground floor of the building; not the room in which they had been previously received, but another.

It was a great, barn-like inclosure, with no seats of any kind, except behind a large desk raised high above the floor, where three men in gorgeous uniforms, glittering with medals and decorations, sat in solemn state.

There were several other men standing about, some on the raised platform and some on the floor.

All surveyed the youthful prisoners in grim silence. George looked in vain for a sympathetic face among them, but there was none to be seen.

Placed in front of the high desk, the boys were now addressed by one of the officers in Russian.

In the same language Nat replied that they could speak little Russian; that they were Americans, and desired an interpreter.

He succeeded in making himself understood, and by the order of the judge a man came forward, saying that he could speak English, and that they could do their talking through him.

The judge then procured a paper and read as follows:

"Ivan Rousky and Pietro Proona, you are charged with being members of the Nihilist lodge meeting at No. 86 Dagma street, which den of traitors was descended upon by the police last night. As you and your fellow members have been plotting against the life of the Czar and the government of this empire, his Imperial Majesty has decreed that there shall be but one sentence meted out to each and every one of you. You are to be sent to Siberia for the term of your natural lives; but as his Imperial Majesty is ever ready to temper justice with mercy, an opportunity is now afforded you to make known any mitigating circumstances which you know to exist. These will be taken into consideration by this court, and if they deem them of sufficient importance they will be laid before the Czar and you will be returned to prison to await his decision in the matter. If not you will at once be sent to Ekatrinnburg to begin your journey to the Siberian mines."

It was a terrible shock to hear these words slowly and solemnly pronounced.

With these three men, then rested the decision whether any story the boys might tell was worthy of consideration. There they sat with faces as immovable as three Sphinxes, but George did not give up hope. Stepping forward he boldly addressed the judges.

"We are not the persons you have named. We are Americans and members of Janeway & Jacks' theatrical company, now performing at the Imperial Theatre. We were seized on the Neva bridge last night and taken to that house. We were never there before; we do not know any of the men who were there. They mistook us for the persons named, and were about to kill us when the police broke into the room. We demand that one of our managers be sent for to identify us, which will prove the statement I am making to be true, and make all plain."

It was a well-worded appeal and seemed to have some effect. The three men behind the desk consulted together for a moment, and then one said:

"It is impossible to do as you request. The Janeway & Jacks' company were ordered out of St. Petersburg last night, and are now on their way to the German frontier."

"They can be telegraphed," said George. "Wire Mr. Jacks. He will tell you that two of his company are missing, and describe us. We are known on the stage as the Zimerini Brothers. Here are letters addressed to me. My name is George Moore; my friend is Nat Franklin, he will show you letters, also."

The letters were passed up, gravely examined by the judges, and handed back. No reply was made to George's suggestion. For a few moments the judges consulted together, and then addressing the boys, one said:

"You claim to be contortionists, do you not?"

"We do," replied George.

"You will be given an opportunity to prove your claim," said the judge. "Do some of your acts here."

This seemed a singular way of getting at the truth, but there was no such thing as disputing the will of these men.

"It's going against us, George," whispered Nat. "If the company has really been ordered out of the city what on earth shall we do?"

"The best we can, every time. Cheer up! Let's do the tumbler act."

"Oh, I can't! I'm sure I should fail. Every joint in my body is stiff from the dampness of that infernal cell!"

"I'll do the chair act," said George; "you can do what you like, but I advise you to try and limber up and do something. It won't do to refuse these fellows, of course."

George then turned to the interpreter and informed him that in order to do their act they would have to strip to the underclothes.

This was told to the judges, and word came back to go ahead.

The boys then proceeded to strip.

By George's order two chairs were placed face to face in front of the judge's desk.

Upon one chair George placed a glass of water, and then mounted the other chair, turning his back to the glass.

It was an old act, of course, but a good one, nevertheless, and the reader must remember that these events happened a number of years ago.

George now announced himself as ready to begin, when suddenly the judge who had been doing the talking ordered him to wait.

"Rona Inavsky!" he called out.

One of the court attendants passed through a side door, and presently returned leading a man securely handcuffed.

George's heart sank.

It was the black-bearded, English-speaking man of the Nihilist lodge!

"Are these the boys?" asked the judge.

"They are, your highness," was the reply.

"Take your places near to them and watch their performance," was the order, and the judge added: "I shall have something to say to you by and by."

Then George got the order to proceed, and there is no denying that it was with a heavy heart that he obeyed.

He now bent backward, further and further, dropping his head until he was able to take the tumbler between his teeth and swallow a portion of the water.

Nat was ready for his act now.

As the moment came for George to seize the tumbler, Nat suddenly bent back until his head almost touched the floor, and then up it came between his legs, with his face turned to George, and in that position he shouted: "Bravo! Bravo! Well done!"

CHAPTER VI.

SENT TO SIBERIA FOR LIFE.

In the Imperial Theatre, where the young contortionists had nightly performed these same acts, they were always greeted with a storm of applause.

Not so here, however, for the majesty of the court would have been insulted.

The really clever contortions of the two boys were received in profound silence.

Rona Inavsky alone seemed to be interested.

When George and Nat straightened up, he looked at them with a sardonic smile.

"Are these the boys?" asked the judge.

"They are, your highness," was Inavsky's reply.

"Is that their act?" was asked again, the interpreter quietly doing his work all the while.

"It is, your highness."

"You mean that they are Ivan Rousky and Pietro Proona?"

"I do, your highness."

"Which is which?"

"That is Rousky," said the Nihilist, pointing to George. "The other is Proona."

"It is false," cried George. "I utterly deny it. We are the boys who have been known in St. Petersburg as the Zimerini Brothers. Do not condemn us upon the word of that traitor! Send for the American minister. He will protect us. He will prove that what we say is true."

There was a long conversation between the three judges then, which the interpreter did not repeat.

"It's all up with us, George," said Nat, dolefully. "They will believe that scoundrel, because they want to believe him, and nothing that we can say will do the least good."

At length the judge who had done the talking turned and addressed the boys again.

"Your request is denied," he said, in measured tones. "This court is satisfied that you are the persons we claim you to be. Further discussion cannot be permitted. Ivan Rousky and Pietro Proona, you are convicted of plotting against the Czar. The sentence is that you shall be sent to Siberia for life."

It was a terrible blow.

No matter to record George's wild attempt to plead his case still further, which was promptly checked.

No matter to describe how they were dragged back to their cell, or to tell of the five weary days and nights which followed before they were taken out of the prison and put into a car, which would disgrace an American cattle train, and then conveyed to Ekaterinburg, a city in Western Siberia, just beyond the Ural mountains.

Here, at that time, the railroad ended, and the long, weary tramp in the chain gang was about to begin.

It was a terrible thing—terrible beyond endurance, and the fact that it was all a mistake did not make it one bit better.

Still, terrible as it was, George and Nat had, in a measure, grown used to the situation, for when one is still young one can accustom himself to anything.

Our two American boys now lived only on the almost vain hope of escape.

Night had fallen on Ekaterinburg when the train came into the barn-like station, and a number of people stood under the flaring lights to see the wretched convicts alight from the cars.

George and Nat were chained together.

There was an iron band around George's left ankle, and one around Nat's right, with a chain about two feet long between them.

It was the same with the wrists.

Thus the boys were allowed some freedom of movement. The iron bands were very close fitting. Probably the hunchback in the prison reported about the handcuffs, and it was understood that a sharp eye must be kept upon the two young contortionists.

At all events, their fetters were more closely fitted than those of any of the other convicts, and they were placed at the head of the line.

"The fun is about to begin, Nat," whispered George, as they stood in the station watching their companions in misery come off the cars. "Do you know I believe that I could work my right hand out of this bracelet, if I was only given time, but where would be the use?"

"It wouldn't be a bit of use," replied Nat. "I think I might do the same thing with both my hands, but you couldn't get the irons off your legs to save your soul."

"Could with a file, all right."

"I think I see you getting a file. Look! By thunder! Who is that? Our old enemy, Rona Inavsky, as true as I'm standing here!"

A man wearing a heavy black beard, and loaded down with chains, had just alighted from the next car chained to a beardless boy with an evil, repulsive face.

It was the English-speaking Nihilist of the secret lodge and no one else. He worked his way toward the boys, dragging his companion after him.

No one attempted to stop him. A line of soldiers stood drawn up along the platform, and no convict could have passed them without being instantly shot down. Thus without any movement the wretched prisoners chose to make inside the line no one attempted to interfere.

"Ha, Rousky! Ha, Proona! Well met, brothers! We are

still together, it seems," said Inavsky, with that same evil smile.

"You're a fiend," said George, "that's what you are. I thought I could never smile again, but I could laugh to see you here."

"Oh, I never hoped to escape," retorted Inavsky. "My doom was sealed from the first. The only satisfaction I had was in putting you two in the same box with me, and I got that all right, it seems."

"Do you really believe that we are the fellows you claim we are?" asked George, controlling himself the best he could.

"Do I believe it? Of course I believe it," was the reply. "I am a man of honor. Do you suppose for a moment that I would swear away the liberty of the innocent? The life, I may say, for if it had not been for the descent of the police you would have been instantly killed."

"You are wrong," said George, with a sigh. "All wrong. Perhaps you believe what you say. I cannot tell. Did you know Rousky and Proona personally? Answer me that."

"I did not; but here comes one who did. Look there at the last car."

Two women were just getting off, chained precisely the same way as the men.

One was old and ugly, the other young and very pretty.

Instantly the boys both recognized her as the girl who had stopped them on the Neva bridge.

"She here!" gasped George.

"Of course," replied the convict. "She was betrayed like the rest of us by the English spy to whom you told our secrets. Ah, Lelia! This way! Here they are! Rousky! Proona! See!"

The girl stopped short and threw up her manacled hands.

"Those boys Rousky and Proona!" she cried. "No, no! It is a mistake! They are not the ones!"

CHAPTER VII.

SORROW WHICH CAME TOO LATE.

George and Nat eyed the excited girl gloomily.

She seemed to be in great agony of mind, and also to be sincere in her grief.

Raising his unmanacled hand to his hat, George said with perfect civility:

"Well, Miss, it is rather late in the day for you to be sorry for the great wrong you have done to us."

"It is! It is, indeed!" replied the girl, weeping.

The old woman to whom she was tied jerked the handcuffs viciously.

"Stop that bawling, you young she-wolf!" she cried in Russian. "What have you to weep for? If you had left husband and children and grandchildren behind you as I have there would be something for you to make a noise about, but as it is there is nothing at all."

"It can't be helped now," continued George, gloomily. "Perhaps you are the cause of the company we belonged to being driven from St. Petersburg—I suppose you are at the bottom of it all."

"I am—I am!" wept the girl. "It was all a mistake. I believed what I said. Merciful heaven, has it not come back to me? Am I not in the same box as yourselves?"

The old woman dragged her roughly away then. She could not understand the English which the girl Lelia spoke with perfect accent, and she was consequently jealous about it. Evidently she thought that Lelia was talking about her.

While this was going on the man Inavsky stood like one paralyzed staring at the boys.

"It can't be! It can't be true!" he kept muttering. "Oh, heaven, what have I done?"

His agitation was terrible. His grief seemed to be sincere.

"What you have done is to have us sent to Siberia," replied George, bitterly. "What you have done is to break up the best chance two young fellows ever had, and to ruin us for life, that's all, and that's enough."

"It is so!" said Inavsky. "Forgive! Forgive!"

George was silent.

Nat was completely overcome, and turned his head away.

"Forgive! Forgive!" repeated Inavsky. "You boys don't know what we have got to go through with. A journey of 3,000 miles on foot, full of perils, lies ahead of us. We may not live to reach our destination—some of us surely never will. It is a fearful thing to die feeling that you have wronged the innocent. Forgive me! Forgive! Forgive!"

"I forgive you, friend," said Nat, brokenly, but George said nothing. He could not find it in his heart to forgive this man who had so deeply wronged him.

Before anything further could be said, the guards started to get the convicts into line, and Inavsky and his companion were lost sight of.

As before, George and Nat were put at the head of the line, for some reason unexplainable.

It was a dismal procession.

In numbers the convicts ran up into the hundreds.

A long line of men, women and children wended their weary way over the snow-covered plain in the rear of the boys.

They were chained two and two, all except the children, who trudged along beside their parents.

For the most part they were a ragged, dirty throng, with stolid, animal-like faces, pitiful to look at, but there were men and women of intelligence and education among them.

In each instance, except the case of George and Nat, every intelligent person was chained to one of the peasant class.

This was in case of any attempt at escape.

It was expected that the peasant would be ready to betray any plot that the other might form.

In front of the train a mounted guard of fifty soldiers rode; in the rear was a similar band, while on each side of the line every twenty feet was a mounted soldier.

These men were provided with whips with long leather lashes.

If anyone showed signs of lagging he or she got the whip over the head.

It made absolutely no difference whether it was man or woman, down came the whip just the same.

There was no objection made to talking, although in former times it is said that if one convict spoke to his mate he was brutally beaten. This was certainly a comfort to George and Nat, and you may be very sure they discussed their miserable situation in all its bearings as they trudged along over the hard, frozen snow.

"You ought to have forgiven Inavsky, George," said Nat. "I know you think I am soft hearted for being so ready to do it, but I could not do otherwise. While our situation is bad, his must be worse a thousand times."

"I don't see it," replied George. "What he suffers we have to suffer, too. He would have killed us there in that Nihilist lodge inside of two minutes if the police had not broken in. I don't see that we have any right to forgive."

"But think of what his feelings must be, now that he knows how deeply he has wronged us. It would drive me mad."

Oh, don't you fool yourself," retorted George. "It won't worry him a bit after a day or two. Why didn't he listen to us at the time? What use is there in talking about it now?"

This was the difference in the boys, and no one can blame George for the stand he took, yet everyone who expects to be forgiven should learn to forgive—there can be no two opinions about that.

The march was continued until noon, and then a halt was made by the side of a frozen stream and provisions were doled out.

The fare was coarse, but such as it was, there was plenty of it. The Russian government does not starve its victims on the march; it has use for them later on.

Every man, or rather every pair of convicts, had to cook his own provisions. A hole was cut in the ice for water, great fires were built, and the meal prepared.

The halt was of two hours' duration, which gave everyone plenty of time, and when the stop was first made, one change for the better came.

The handcuffs were now removed from all but a few of the more refractory prisoners and some who were positive criminals—who had committed murder and the like.

The leg irons, however, were not disturbed. They were to remain as they were to the end of the weary march.

At the end of the halt the march was resumed, and continued until nightfall, when the wretched procession came to a group of long, low buildings, which marked the end of the first day's journey.

This was the first of a long series of convict stations, which, in those days, stretched out along the road from Ekaterinburg to Tobolsk, and beyond.

Each of these stations was under the command of a Russian officer and a company of soldiers.

To escape from one was next to impossible.

The men were now turned into one of the long buildings to pass the night, the women being quartered in another.

They were little better than cattle pens.

An enormous stove heated the long room beyond endurance. There were no beds, and no chairs. The convicts could sit on the floor, lie down or stand up, just as they pleased, but nothing in the shape of furnishing was deemed necessary to in-

crease their comfort in any way, and to make matters worse the place was abominably dirty and filled with vermin.

We have described this station in some detail, because it was the same with every other one all along the road.

George and Nat lay sleepless on the floor that night, but they learned to sleep later, and finally came to look forward to their arrival at these stations as a relief.

This was the first day. The second was just like it, and thirty more followed before there came the slightest change to break the monotony of the dreary march.

George and Nat were now deep in the wilds of Siberia, with no more chance of escape from their awful situation than they had of flying to the moon.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE MARCH.

Yet, hopeless as the situation seemed, a change was close at hand which was destined to bring about the escape of many of the convicts, for the time being at least, and as George, Moore and Nat Franklin were among the number we propose to break in upon the monotony of the long march and advance our story to the time and place where it occurred.

It was now the middle of February and the cold had become most intense.

We have said nothing about the sufferings of the boys from cold, for where is the use? Besides, their case was not one-tenth part as bad as that of most of the convicts, for they were both provided with good overcoats, mufflers and gloves, which had not been taken from them. The worst was their feet, for the soles of their shoes had long ago been worn through, and it would have gone hard with them if they had not wrapped their feet up in old bagging which the guards were instructed to provide freely for all who cared to use it.

It was wonderful how warm it kept them, and it worked all right in cold weather. The worst was when the thaws came and the road was slushy. Wet feet brought on chilblains, and Nat had his feet frozen three times, while George got the same dose twice, so the boys both suffered a good deal on that score.

But to come to the escape.

Rouvna station was left behind at six o'clock in the morning, and the march for Plestesky taken up at an early hour, for the distance was longer than usual, and as it looked like snow, it was thought desirable to make an early start.

The storm struck the convict band at a little after four o'clock in the afternoon, with a good hour's march still ahead of them.

It proved to be a regular blizzard, and George and Nat, still at the head of the line, got the worst of all.

There was not much talking done during that hour, you may be very sure.

Nat began to give out at about half-past four, and he caught hold of George's arm, exclaiming: "I'm afraid I'm a goner! I don't believe I can keep on my feet ten minutes longer. What shall I do?"

George was terribly frightened, and no wonder, for a break down meant simply death.

During that long, weary march the boys had seen many dreadful things happen.

To break down meant first the whip and then the revolver.

Those who failed completely, and could not be driven ahead any further, were simply shot, the leg irons opened and the partner driven on with the rest, while the carcass of the poor wretch who had given out was left for the wolves.

In one case, where the key to the leg iron would not work, the boys saw a woman who was perfectly able to go ahead shot down with her partner.

They could not detach her from the dying woman at her side, so she was simply killed and the two corpses thrown out of the road.

Horrible? Of course it was horrible, but we are simply relating what was a common occurrence in those days.

"Brace up, Nat! You lean on me!" said George, encouragingly. "If you don't we will be sent to the rear sure, and you know what will happen then."

"I'm doing my best, George."

"What's the matter? Are you in pain?"

"No, no! Just weakness. This snow in my face seems to take my breath away. I can scarcely raise one foot above the other. Oh, heavens! Here it comes!"

The burly Cossack guard on Nat's side had just caught sight of him.

"Stand up there!" he shouted, cracking his whip. The boys

both understand Russian well enough now to know all that was said.

Poor Nat tried to brace up, but his foot-steps faltered, and he had to cling to George for support.

Crack! Crack! The merciless whip came down over his head and shoulders.

"Don't strike him! Leave him to me, and I'll help him up," cried George.

"You had better," said the guard, warningly. "If you don't there will be another dose, and if that don't work you two will be sent to the rear."

George knew what he meant.

For a while they would be allowed to hobble along the best they could with the other weaklings, but if they fell too far behind it meant death to Nat and nothing else.

But Nat himself was almost past caring.

He groaned under the lash that time, but when he got it again, as he did in about fifteen minutes, he simply clung to George without life enough to utter a sound.

George thought he was dead. He actually believed that he was holding up a corpse.

His strong arm was tight about Nat, the poor boy's head rested upon his shoulder, and his feet did not move. George was simply carrying him along.

Of course this could not last long.

"Fall out!" cried the Cossack. "To the rear!"

The fatal words fell heavily upon George, but they seemed to rouse Nat to action.

He suddenly straightened up and stood on his feet.

"I'm all right! I can go on!" he cried, and so he did until the station at Plestesky was reached.

He had slept while George was carrying him, and the sleep had done him good.

But now a surprise awaited all, guards and convicts alike.

As they neared the station a bright light was seen shining through the snow ahead of them. They could hear voices shouting: "Fire! Fire!" and the dreadful truth dawned upon all.

Here they were in a raging snowstorm in the midst of a vast wilderness.

For miles around there was supposed to be no other shelter than the station at Plestesky.

Cold, hungry, worn out with the fatigue of the long march, the condition of the wretched band was truly deplorable.

From some cause or another, which the boys never learned, the station had taken fire, and when they came in sight of it they saw that it was wrapped in flames.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ESCAPE.

It was just as serious a matter for the soldiers and guards as it was for the convicts, for all stood an equal chance of perishing in the storm.

On the right lay a frozen river with high mountains rising beyond it; on the left was a dense forest of dark hemlocks and firs.

Escape might well have seemed hopeless—it was hopeless to any number of these wretched beings—yet there were some wild spirits among them ready to take any desperate chance.

The instant the truth was discovered the order came for the soldiers to ride ahead and assist in putting out the fire.

The convict train was halted and stood in the storm protected only by the guards.

Who started the fire the boys never knew, but some one did.

Suddenly there was a wild cry, and twenty voices seemed to shout all at once:

"Down with the guards! Down with the guards!"

It was mutiny! It was also madness!

Madness is sometimes catching. It proved so in this case.

All in an instant there was a rush made upon the Cossacks, several of whom were dragged off their horses and trampled to death.

The rest, seized with panic, dashed on to join the soldiers, yelling:

"An uprising! An uprising!" and calling for help.

And help came in time to stop the movement in part, but not altogether.

A great number of the convicts made a rush for the frozen river.

It was a mad stampede, a hopeless struggle for freedom.

It began in the front of the column, with the convicts sur-

rounding George and Nat, and the boys were hurried along with the rest.

"George! George! What shall we do? This means death!" gasped Nat.

"Death and nothing else!" groaned George. "If we get to the mountains we shall only starve, if we are not captured, and if we are we shall be surely shot."

He was wrong there, for the Russian government shoots no able-bodied man who is likely to be of any use to it, but it meant the knout and the quicksilver mines and other horrors even worse than death.

There was no help for the boys, however.

In it they were, and in it they had to stay, at least until they could detach themselves from the crowd.

They were borne helplessly on over the frozen river and into the forest and up the mountainside.

Here the mad crowd began to scatter.

Some fell in the snow, some went to the right, and some to the left.

There was no more pushing and crowding. The boys could have gone back if they had wanted to, and this is what George started to do.

"We can never hope to escape, Nat," he said, stopping short. "Let's go back and give ourselves up. This is only madness. Every man and woman of these fools is simply going to sure death."

He was just about to turn back when a tall man with a heavy black beard dragging a stupid-looking boy after him by the irons, came rushing up to them through the snow.

"No, no! Don't go back! Don't go back!" he exclaimed in English. "There is a chance—there is always a chance! We might as well perish here on the mountain to-night as to go on to our destination. You boys don't realize what lies before you—what we have to expect."

"Inavsky!" gasped George, recognizing the man with whom he had never exchanged one word since their meeting in the station at Ekaterinburg, although he had seen him many times.

"Yes; Inavsky!" cried the Nihilist. "Look here, boy; I've got a file. I managed to secrete it before we started, and no one has taken it away from me since. I can get off the leg-irons if we can only find shelter. We may succeed in working our way to the Turaguese settlements, and so on south. There is hope! Try it! Strike out for freedom with me."

The prospect was too tempting for George to refuse.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed. "I'm with you if Nat can stand it. But can we trust you? That's the point."

"Kill me if I betray you!" cried Inavsky. "I will never raise a hand against you. Boys, you don't know us Russians. We are bad enemies, but we are also good friends, true friends. Here, I will help carry our Nat. Get back of him on one side; I will take hold of him on the other; between us we will help him along. Straight on! Straight on! One way is as good as another, and our only chance is to keep away from those madmen. Where they go the soldiers will go. Ha! Here they come!"

A loud shout was heard on the river. Looking back among the trees they could see fifty, at least, of the troop running across the ice.

They had left their horses behind them, and they carried their rifles ready for business.

To meet them meant death, but, as the Nihilist said, they followed the crowd separating at the base of the mountain and dashing fearlessly into the woods right and left.

Meanwhile, George and the others were pushing on with what speed they could.

It was not much, however. Nat was perfectly helpless now.

The excitement had put the finishing touch to the poor boy's condition. He never said a word, but just let his head rest upon George's shoulder as they carried him along.

The fact was he had fainted, but George thought that he was dead.

"We will save him. We will save him!" cried the Nihilist. "On! On! Just a little further! Ah, heaven! What is this?"

They had come suddenly up against a wall of rock which towered above their heads as far as they could see.

They hurried to the right and came to a precipice; turning, they tried it on the left and came to another.

All at once there was a shout behind them.

"This way!" cried a voice. "This way! Some of them went this way!"

"They are tracking us!" cried George. "All is lost."

"Never say it until the Cossack's hand is upon your shoulder or the bullet enters your heart!" retorted Inavsky. "Here! What is this? Stoop low! Crawl in under these rocks."

There was an open space low down on the ledge which did not reach to the ground.

All stooped down and crawled under the overhanging ledge, dragging poor Nat after them the best they could.

"Saved!" gasped Inavsky. "By St. Michael, the Lord is with us! Saved! Saved!"

They were at the entrance to a cave.

Before them extended a large black opening in under the cliffs, the roof of which was about as high as their heads.

Into this they crawled and stood huddled together as the soldiers came hurrying up to the cliffs.

CHAPTER X.

THE AWFUL NIGHT OF SUSPENSE.

"Well, here we are," gasped Inavsky. "Now it's life or death! Wait, let us see which!"

George lay panting upon the floor of the cave, more dead than alive.

Nat lay upon the floor beside his friend, scarcely breathing.

Such was the desperate situation when the Russian soldiers wallowing through the snow came up the mountainside and against the cliffs.

Of course they halted, for without the secret of the cave they could go no further.

Lights flashed under the rocks. George could hear them talking, and he knew enough Russian now to understand almost every word that was said.

"They came this way!" one voice exclaimed.

"Certainly they did," another replied.

"But where did they go? Which way did they turn?"

"They seemed to have turned both ways, as near as I can see."

"Follow to the right, you, Ivan. I'll take it to the left. We must find them, if they are still here."

"Where shall we meet?"

"A shot will call us together. If I find them I will fire twice."

They separated then.

"Keep perfectly quiet," said Inavsky. "They will be back again, of course."

The wait was only a minute.

Back they came, swearing terribly.

"They must have jumped off the rocks my way," said the first voice.

"Same my way," replied the other.

"Sure they did not return?"

"How can we tell? There is not snow enough under the ledges to leave tracks."

"And what tracks there are lead to the precipice your way?"

"They do. How about yours?"

"It is the same."

"We have lost them, Ivan."

"Certainly we have, Michael."

"Let us then return down the mountain and join the others. We are but wasting time here."

Their retreating footsteps were eagerly listened to by the fugitives in the cave, you may be sure.

We have neglected to mention that all this time Inavsky had, chained to him, a stupid-looking lad.

At length the flash of the light was seen no more, and the voices ceased to be heard.

The enemy had departed, and Inavsky, falling on his knees, prayed in Russian.

"Safe! Safe!" he cried, springing up at last with such violence that he threw the boy on his face.

The boy set up a howl and began to scold in peculiar language.

"Peace, dog! Do you want to betray us with your yelping?" cried Inavsky, giving him a brutal kick. "Peace, I say! Peace!"

"Don't hurt the poor fellow," pleaded George.

"Hurt him! How can you hurt such swine? Get up, Peter! Stand on your feet!"

"What is he? Not a Russian?" said George.

"No, no! No Russian. A Tunguese."

"That is, one of the native tribes who inhabit this part of the country?"

"Yes. He has been several years in Russia, but Siberia is his native land."

"You can speak his language? You understand him?"

"Not I! I know nothing of it. He can speak Russian, though. Can't you, Peter?"

"I can. I can speak three tongues," replied Peter, proudly.

"I can speak my language, and I can speak your language, and I can speak Chinese."

"He means the Tartar Chinese of the northern frontier," said Inavsky. "It is very different from the true Chinese."

"How near are we to the frontier?"

"I do not know. Perhaps a hundred miles; perhaps more, perhaps less. I cannot tell."

"Are we not near Tobolski?"

"We are beyond Tobolski. We followed the southern route. We were to go to certain mines near the frontier. Hark! Some of those poor wretches have been overtaken. Hear their cries."

Shots were heard mingling with wild shouts and yells.

For a few moments they continued, then all was still.

"Have they killed them all?" breathed George.

"No, no! One or two, perhaps, but no more. All will get the knout, but the soldiers do not kill. The Czar has need of those men at the mines. What good is a dead man to dig for silver and gold?"

"That's so," sighed George. "But what shall we do? We shall all be dead before many days, I fear."

"Don't say it; don't think it," replied Inavsky. "We are going to fight for our lives, boy. First of all, to look to your friend."

"He is dead already, I am afraid," groaned George. "I don't think anything can save him, even if there is still life left."

"Never give up! Never! Never! Never!" cried Inavsky.

"See what we have done already. By keeping well under the rocks where there was but little snow, we have thrown them off the scent. They will not return. It will be supposed that we wandered away and perished on the mountain. We are safe."

"I wish I could think so," sighed George, who was shivering so that he could scarcely speak; "but what are you staring about for? If you can see no more than I can see in this dark hole, that is just nothing at all."

"Wait!" said the Nihilist. "I am listening. I have reason to believe that there is some one here beside ourselves."

"What!"

"Oh, don't be scared. It is no worse than one of our own people; some poor wretch like ourselves."

"But what makes you think so?"

"I saw footprints leading up to the rocks before we made any in the snow; you did not observe them, but I did."

"This is important."

"Indeed it is. Whist! I will call. Perhaps we shall get an answer. That will settle it. Now!"

"Is any one here? Is any one here?" the Nihilist shouted in Russian then.

There was silence for a moment, and then as though coming from a great distance off, a voice called back:

"Who speaks?"

Inavsky shouted some rapid words that George could not understand.

"Ah, my friend, it is you, then!" the voice replied. "Wait, I will come!"

"That's a woman!" cried George.

"It is," replied Inavsky. "Wait a moment. You are going to be treated to a surprise."

Footsteps were heard in the distance. There was some one approaching through the depths of the cave.

But at the same instant George heard a still more welcome sound.

It was simply his own name spoken in Nat's voice.

"Nat! Nat!" he cried, dropping upon his knees beside his friend.

While George bent over Nat, chafing his hands, the footsteps came close up to them.

"Is it you, then?" cried Inavsky. A girl, dragging a clanking chain, to which an iron ball was attached, was approaching.

George could not see her face, but he knew the voice when she said:

"Yes, it is I, Inavsky. Whom have we here?"

It was Lelia Resky, the girl who had betrayed George and Nat into the hands of the Nihilists that night on the Neva bridge.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STAB THROUGH THE CAVE.

Morning came at last and to the intense relief of all daylight crept into the cave.

The situation of the convicts had changed considerably for the better.

Nat slept some and woke up quite his old self.

While he slept Peter, the Tunguese, had worked on the leg irons which bound George and Nat together, for Inavsky insisted that the first attempt should be made with them.

The file was a small one, but Peter was strong and patient. Before midnight he had the irons cut through both on George's leg and Nat's, and the boys were free.

Then it was Inavsky's turn to be freed from Peter.

George did that while Nat slept.

He proved just as good a hand at the file as Peter, and about two o'clock he had the satisfaction of seeing the leg iron drop away from the Nihilist's leg.

It was Lelia's turn next and Inavsky took his turn at the file.

The horrible old woman who was chained to Lelia had given out the first week of the journey.

She was promptly shot and her body left for the wolves to devour and since then Lelia with a heavy ball and chain attached to her leg had traveled on alone.

Inavsky had the iron cut through by three o'clock and the file was then turned over to Peter, who soon had the band off his own leg. Thus with the dawn all stood free.

It turned off warmer in the night and the storm ceased.

Of course there was a great deal of talking done as the night wore on.

Again and again Inavsky and Lelia expressed their sorrow at the sad mistake which had put the boys in their present plight, but just how it came to be made they never knew.

Lelia was a bright, cheerful person and Inavsky seemed full of energy and pluck.

They talked freely on every subject but the affairs of the Nihilist lodge. Concerning that they never exchanged a word in the hearing of the boys.

"Well," exclaimed Inavsky, as daylight came creeping into the cave, "here we are, and now what to do? It is most fortunate that you found the cave, Lelia. My anxiety from the first was for you. It was the best of good luck that sent you here and I look upon it as an omen. We are going to have good luck right through. Never shall the Czar's mines see us—we are going to escape."

"We have got to take the first step, however," replied George, "and it puzzles me not a little to know what that is to be."

"That's decided already," replied Inavsky. "Peter and I have been talking. He thinks he knows this place. He says that there are Tunguese settlements on the other side of the mountain; and remember, George, every step taken in that direction is a step toward freedom. Only thing is if Nat can stand it."

"I can stand anything the rest can," declared Nat. "I'm all right now. Have no fears about me."

"First of all to see where we are and then for the start," said the Nihilist. "Worst is, we have nothing to eat and may have nothing for several days to come. Let us take account of stock, boys, and see what we possess that is liable to be useful to us in our present situation. I have the file. I also have several hundred matches hidden away in my clothes, but that is all."

"I have a big jack-knife," said George. "I have kept it hidden in my boot."

"Good! Good! And Nat?"

"I don't think I can offer anything to the common stock," replied Nat. "What does Lelia say?"

"I have matches," replied Lelia, "several thousand of them, and also a pair of scissors and some needles and thread."

Peter had nothing, but Inavsky declared that George's knife was worth all the rest.

The party now ventured to leave the cave and go out upon the cliffs.

They could look down upon the river and across to the ruined station at Plestesky.

There the blackened remains of the buildings could be distinctly seen and before them stood the convict band with the soldiers drawn up in line.

Evidently many of the convicts had been found and brought back again and the day's march was about to begin.

As they stood watching them they saw the start made and they saw something else which filled them with alarm.

Only a portion of the soldiers joined the procession, the others as the start was made, leaving their horses behind them, turned abruptly and started to cross the frozen river.

"They are coming after us and the others who have not been captured!" cried Inavsky. "It is useless for us to think of trying to cross the mountain now. We must remain exactly where we are."

"I'm ready for anything but that," said George. "To stay here and wait for them to come and get us won't suit me at all. What do you say to pushing on through the cave? There may be another opening. It wouldn't surprise me at all if that were so and if it is we can come out on some other part of the mountain where very likely we shall be safe."

"I'm with you," said Inavsky. "I don't object to that at all."

"For my part I was just about to propose it," said Lelia. I thought so, by the sound, and when I lit two of my matches I could not see the walls anywhere."

"The sooner we start the better," said Inavsky. "You may be very sure they will hunt for this place first of all. Wait! I will throw these irons down over the rocks below. It won't do for them to be found here."

Hastily gathering up the broken irons and the ball and chain Inavsky crawled out under the overhanging ledge and threw them down over the rocks.

He was back again in a moment with his eyes all ablaze with excitement.

"They are coming right up the hill!" he cried. "We start now. It's a question of must! There is nothing else for us to do. You lead off, George. Each one take hold of the other so that we may not get separated. No lighting of matches yet. I'll bring up the rear, because I can better understand what they are saying. Now we go!"

In single file and holding on to each other the wretched convicts started off into the darkness.

They were none too soon. Inside of a few moments loud shouts were heard behind them.

"They have come!" breathed the Nihilist. "They are in the cave. Hark! Don't you hear what they are saying? They know that we have been there."

"We can never escape them!" groaned Lelia.

George said nothing, but pushed on rapidly.

His heart sank, for he could hear the footsteps of the soldiers hurrying after them and it seemed to him simply impossible that they could escape.

CHAPTER XII.

BEARSKINS AND BEARS.

"George, this isn't going to go," whispered Nat, who came next behind.

"I'm going, however," replied George, "and I'm going to keep on going until we are captured; that's all."

"That's right. Push ahead! Push ahead!" cried Inavsky. "Never give up until the last gasp! Hello! What's the matter now?"

The matter was they all went down in a heap, tumbling on top of each other and Peter started up the echoes of the cave with a yell of terror.

"Stop that, you fool!" whispered Inavsky, clapping his hand over the Tunguese boy's mouth, for Inavsky being last was on top of the pile.

"Wait a minute," said George; "we have made a discovery here."

"What is it? There is no time to wait."

"Skins of some sort. I'm going to strike a match, if you will let me have one."

"No, no! That would give us dead away."

"I don't think so. They must have a light and we don't see it, so they can't see ours. Try it, Inavsky. They have stopped, anyhow. I think we are safe enough."

"I'll do as you say, though I think we run a risk," replied the Nihilist, at the same time striking the match.

"A find in furs!" cried Nat. "That's what we went over. This will serve us a good turn all right, George."

"You bet it will," said George. "If we can't send those soldiers hustling out of the cave now, I don't know a thing. Lelia, you and Inavsky and Peter crouch down behind that big rock there; leave the rest to Nat and me."

What they had stumbled over was a pile of six or eight bearskins.

Evidently some hunter had made a storehouse of the cave; but, be that as it may, George instantly comprehended Nat's idea of the good use to which they could be put.

The rock alluded to was an enormous mass, which had probably fallen from the roof of the cave.

It was big enough to shelter a dozen people and Inavsky, Lelia and Peter had scarcely taken their places behind it when the tramp of feet was heard again and a ray of light was seen in the distance.

A man was coming into the cave carrying a lantern.

He was one of the Russian soldiers and at least a dozen more were close behind him.

At the point where the light appeared the cave took a turn, which accounted for its not being seen before.

"Going to do the bear act, I suppose?" whispered George. "Of course," said Nat. "Was there ever anything so lucky as finding these skins? It looks as though they were put here on purpose for us; only thing is how the deuce are we going to fasten them on?"

"Only thing is if we don't get shot for our trouble," replied George. "I've got plenty of safety pins. No difficulty about making the skins stay on."

To imitate a couple of performing bears was one of the regular acts of the Zimerini Brothers and these skins were just as good for their purposes as the ones they always carried about with them.

The heads and claws were on, and although the skins had not been tanned at all, they were still flexible enough to do the work.

In a moment the two boys had each appropriated one and wrapped it around him.

George supplied the pins and as they were accustomed to work very rapidly they were ready for business in a moment.

On came the soldiers, talking and calling out to each other. They were armed with muskets and certainly the prospect was anything but a pleasant one to contemplate as the boys peeped out from under the skins.

The man with the lantern had no gun and was considerably ahead.

"I don't believe you will find them here, Captain Pushkin!" he called out. "How could they find the opening under those rocks on a night as dark as last night was? I say, we are making a mistake to waste time in this place."

"Get on! Get on!" shouted the officer. "It may be that you are right, but I am going a little farther, at all events. Holy St. Michael! What now?"

Suddenly a terrific growling was heard and two bears came waddling out of the shadows into full view.

"Bears! Bears!" yelled the man with the lantern. "Shoot them, captain!"

George was very close to him and he made one quick rush, snarling and snapping. Rising up he struck at the fellow with all his might, knocking him flat.

Instantly the light was extinguished, the lantern having fallen from his hand.

The growling grew more terrifying than ever then.

Two shots were fired as the lantern went out and then the whole party took to their heels and ran back through the darkness.

The man with the lantern, gaining his feet, sprinted back with the rest.

"This is no place for us! They are not here!" Nat heard one of the soldiers cry out.

In a moment they had passed around the bend of the rocks and were gone.

"Hold on, Nat! Don't make a move yet," whispered George. "We want to see first if they are coming back again."

They waited fully ten minutes before venturing to call Inavsky to strike a match.

"Capital! Capital!" cried the Nihilist. "You did that well. Lelia laughed so that if I had not kept my hand over her mouth I don't know what might have happened."

"They are gone and what is more I don't believe they mean to come back again," said Lelia. "Is it safe to light the lantern now?"

"I think so; try it," replied George. "This is great luck. If the oil only holds out half our troubles are over. We had better each one of us take one of these skins along; they will be elegant for sleeping in if it turns off cold, as it is sure to do soon."

The lantern was lighted and for a few moments they waited in fear and trembling.

Nothing more was heard of the soldiers and soon the march was resumed.

For more than an hour they kept on through the cave. At last it began to grow narrower and suddenly George saw daylight ahead.

"We are coming out!" he cried.

"Yes, and some one is coming in!" gasped Inavsky. "Look!"

The form of a giant man, clothed entirely in skins, suddenly rose up between them and the light.

He held an enormous club in his hand and as he caught sight of the little party he threw back his head and with a savage yell, rushed toward them, waving his club wildly.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMONG THE TUNGUESE.

The sudden appearance of the big, heavy giant up against the light was enough to startle any one and it is no wonder Lelia grasped George's arm, trembling all over, as she clung to him.

"Hold on! Don't say a word—don't be scared!" exclaimed the Nihilist, in a hurried whisper. "It's only a Tunguese. Talk to him, Peter. Find out what he wants."

But Peter held back. He seemed to be almost as badly scared as Lelia herself.

Inavsky pushed him forward, however, and while the rest stood still he advanced to meet the giant, who was coming forward swinging his club with a threatening air.

His whole appearance changed, however, when Peter began to talk to him and they kept up a rapid conversation for several minutes.

It was the harshest language George had ever heard.

Nat said it sounded like Chinese, but Inavsky declared that it bore no resemblance to the Chinese language whatever.

After a little Peter seemed to satisfy the Tunguese and he held out his right hand toward Inavsky, putting the left behind him and shaking his head so violently that his great mop of long, black hair went swishing across his face.

"It's all right now; that's his way of saying how do you do—glad to see you," exclaimed Peter. "Don't touch his hand, but hold out yours toward him and shake your heads the same way. Then we will all be friends."

This was done and the friendship was put on a firmer basis when the Tunguese, saying the Russian word for tobacco several times, got a plug from Inavsky, who had managed to conceal several about him, it seemed.

"He's all right now," said Peter. "He lives in a village only a little way from here. He says he knew my father and that he will help us. It is well that we met."

Peter was right in making this statement, for the meeting with the hairy Tunguese giant probably saved their lives.

They had reached the end of the cave now and the Tunguese led the way out into the open and they saw that they had passed through the mountain and were now looking down upon an immense stretch of country which extended away toward the south as far as the eye could reach.

Far in the distance the boys could distinguish the line of a river, frozen, of course, with snow-covered mountains rising beyond, while at the foot of the mountain there was a collection of skin-covered tents, which Peter declared to be the Tunguese village.

Before starting down to this village, which the Tunguese wanted to do right away, Inavsky with Peter's help started in to ask him a great number of questions.

The boys listened attentively and were able to understand enough to grasp Inavsky's plan.

The distant river was the Amoor, which marks the frontier between this part of Siberia and the Chinese empire.

The mountains the Tunguese declared to be in China and he promised to guide the party across the river if they wanted to go.

The boys and Lelia were wild with delight.

It seemed to them that their troubles were all over and as they began to descend the mountain Lelia said as much a great many times, but Inavsky threw cold water on it all when he took George aside and said:

"Don't hope for too much, my boy. That girl is too enthusiastic. She does not know these Tunguese; they are the most superstitious and treacherous people on the face of the earth and if the soldiers come they would sell us out in a moment—that is so."

"But Peter would help us," said George. "He will be a host in himself. I can't help feeling encouraged, Inavsky. I believe it is all going to come out right now."

"How can we trust Peter?" was the reply. "What do we know of him? I never saw the boy until I was chained to him just before we got on the train. He is like all the rest of his people, treacherous. You can believe nothing they say, and notwithstanding the Amoor looks so near, it is at least a hundred miles away from us. We have plenty of trouble ahead, you may be very sure; but there is no use in saying so to Lelia, for it only will cast her down."

"What he says is true, of course," remarked Nat, when George came to report this conversation. "All the same, I believe we are going to escape. I don't look ever to see the inside of a Siberian mine now, and, for my part, I had just as soon be killed by the Tunguese as to die on the march."

"There's a way out of it," said George, quietly, "and before we get through with the Tunguese I think we can surprise them a bit and Inavsky and Lelia, too."

Nat laughed, saying: "Oh, I know what you mean well enough, but I'm so stiff that I don't know as I ever could do it."

"You can, and you must," said George and they talked together in whispers for a while as they kept on down the mountain, following Peter and the Tunguese.

At last they reached the level and a short walk brought them to the village.

Peter and the Tunguese had gone ahead and carried the news of their coming and the result was a great commotion among the tents.

Men, women and children turned out in great numbers to meet them. Huge, shaggy dogs, barking furiously, came dashing ahead of the throng and the men waved long spears, shouting and yelling in a way that was anything but encouraging, to say the least.

"By St. Michael, I don't like this!" exclaimed Inavsky. "It would be just like that rascal Peter to make himself secure and let his people turn us over to the Russians for a reward."

"We can't do a thing about it," said Lelia. "We have got to take everything just as it comes."

George and Nat, keeping close together, made no reply.

"You seem to take it easy," remarked the Nihilist, who appeared to be rather vexed that the boys did not get as excited over the situation as he was himself.

"Wait," replied George. "Let them come a bit nearer and then Nat and I will do our part."

"Hello! I can guess what you are driving at!" exclaimed Inavsky.

"Hold our coats then," said George. "We must be free."

Off came the overcoats, which Inavsky threw across his arm and as the yelling crowd of savages drew near the young contortionists suddenly bent their bodies back farther and farther until their heads touched the ground.

The Tunguese stopped short and stared in awe.

Then the heads of the two boys came up between their legs and with their faces turned outward and their hands extended they went waddling toward the Tunguese, who broke ranks with yells of terror and fled back toward the tents.

"Good! Good!" cried Inavsky.

"Just the thing!" exclaimed Lelia; "you have them where we want them now!"

With a bound the boys were on their feet again and they all walked toward the tents slowly.

It looked like a deserted village now. Even the dogs, scared off by what they probably took to be two mysterious monsters, had taken to their heels and disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON TO THE FRONTIER.

George got to laughing so that he could scarcely speak.

"That fixed them!" he exclaimed.

"Indeed it did," declared Inavsky. "They look upon you as great shamans, I'm sure."

"What are shamans?" asked Nat.

"Jugglers," replied the Nihilist. "Same as the medicine men among your Indians. The Tunguese tribes are great on that sort of thing."

"We'll give them another dose when they show themselves again," said Nat. "Even Peter seemed to get scared. Here he comes now."

Peter came sneaking out of a tent. He gazed upon the boys with a look of awe.

"The chief wants to speak, but he is afraid," he said. "I did not know that they were shamans," he added, pointing to the boys. "The chief is very much afraid."

"Oh, we won't hurt him, Peter," exclaimed George. "Tell him to come right out and bring everybody else with him, only, like a good boy, keep the dogs off. If he is afraid of shamans, we are afraid of dogs."

Peter popped into a tent and presently came out with a very stout Tunguese and two women.

Many others were peeping out from behind the skins which hung in front of the tents and all eyes were fixed upon the boys.

Inavsky was still loaded down with the coats and the bearskins, which he had taken charge of to leave the boys free to do their act.

Immediately George and Nat turned their heads completely around and, facing behind them, advanced toward the chief and the women.

All three gave yells of terror and vanished into the tent

again, leaving Peter standing with his mouth and eyes wide open.

"Oh, you are great shamans! Great shamans!" he cried. "You frighten my people almost to death."

"Tell them we are the greatest shamans in the world, Peter," said Inavsky. "Tell them we want two dog teams to take us to the river and a guide and food enough to last us on the journey. Tell them if they will let us have these things I will give them all these bearskins and that if they refuse the shaman boys will put a curse on the village and all their children and dogs will die. Tell them that, Peter, and tell them quick."

"It is a great thing to have professionals with us," said Lelia. "We are going to get what we want here."

"Shall we give them any more?" asked George. "We can let them have half a dozen acts if you say the word."

"No, no!" replied Inavsky. "You have given them enough. You can't trust these Tunguese. The only way to do is to make them afraid of you. Mark what I tell you, boys, Peter will never go with us. He is just as much afraid as the rest."

While they stood quietly waiting the Tunguese came sneaking out of the tents one by one.

Inavsky spoke to them in Russian, but they did not seem to understand a word he said.

At last Peter appeared again.

"It shall be as you wish, my lord," he said to Inavsky; "but the chief says you must go to a tent, which I will show you, and he wants you to start now, just as soon as the dogs can be harnessed to the sled."

"Good!" cried Inavsky. "You are coming with us, of course, Peter?"

Peter said yes, but he evidently meant no, for from that time forward they saw nothing of him.

Inavsky declared that he probably changed his clothes and dressed himself like the rest.

In one of the Tunguese skin coats and a heavy woolen hood pulled down over his eyes it would have been difficult to recognize Peter.

In fact there was a great sameness about the faces of these Tunguese. Lelia and the boys declared that they all looked exactly alike.

But they did not bother themselves about Peter, of course.

If the Tunguese boy wanted to stay with his friends nobody had the least objection.

He led the way to a large empty tent at the edge of the village and then disappearing was never seen again.

Here they waited almost an hour before any one came near them, although the Tunguese gathered at the doors of their tents were watching them all the time.

A little before the end of the hour three men appeared timidly, each carrying a great basket packed with frozen bear's meat, dried venison and a kind of native bread.

There were flasks of some fermented liquor like kumyss also, and rolls of butter.

Inavsky declared that there were provisions enough to last a month if they were carefully used.

A little after that two dog sleds, drawn by six dogs each, appeared.

They were driven by old men, who seemed to be terribly afraid of the shamans.

Each of the drivers turned his head away as he drove up to the tent.

This Inavsky declared was to ward off the evil eye.

One of the drivers could speak fairly good Russian and he announced that everything was ready for a start, so two of the baskets were put on the first sled with the boys and one on the other, in which Inavsky and Lelia rode.

The Russian-speaking Tunguese, who drove this sled, declared that he knew nothing of Peter and did not think he was coming, so after some hesitation the start was made without him and away the sleds went flying over the snow, passing out of sight of the village in a few minutes and entering a dense forest, where they flew on among giant trees which grew wide apart, with no sign of a road.

It was a great triumph.

George was fairly wild with excitement.

"We've won!" he cried. "We are safely off for China! Hooray! We have seen the last of the convict gang forever!"

"Don't you be too sure," Inavsky called back. "I only hope it is so, but until we are fairly across the Amoor we can't call ourselves safe from the power of the Czar."

"How about it when we get to China?" asked Nat. "Won't the Russians be able to follow us across the frontier?"

"They would in a minute if they knew we were there," replied Inavsky; "but I'm not going to do any croaking, boys.

Everything has gone finely so far and our good luck may hold out to the end."

There was no further trouble that day at all events.

Before night came they had covered twenty miles and were still in the forest.

It was beginning to grow colder now and the wind sighed dismally among the tree-tops.

"It looks like a storm," remarked Inavsky, as his sled came up alongside the one the boys were on for the moment. "I can't make this old fellow say where we are going to pass the night."

"Perhaps he don't know," suggested George. "We are managing to keep warm enough. Unless there is going to be a big storm, I don't know that it really makes any difference. I'd just as soon ride all night as not."

"I wouldn't," returned Inavsky. "There's something wrong about it all, I'm afraid. When we first started out this old fellow could speak English well enough, but now he seems to have forgotten every word of it. Lelia feels very much worried about this."

"Indeed I do," said Lelia. "You see, I have heard a lot about the treachery of these Tunguese. My father spent two years among them. They are a merciless race and very sly."

"We are coming somewhere at last!" cried Inavsky. "See, there's a light ahead."

The light burned faintly among the trees and at the same moment it was discovered the Tunguese who was driving the boys' sled gave a wild and piercing cry.

"I don't like that," muttered Inavsky. "That's a signal, sure. I'm afraid the old chief has sent a runner on ahead to tell them that we are coming. I wonder what it means?"

"It means treachery," said Lelia, dismally. "If they don't rob and murder us we shall do well."

"Well, really, I don't see what they are going to rob us of," laughed Nat, "and if it comes to a matter of murder, why, we can fight as well as they."

He had scarcely spoken when an answering cry was heard in the forest and the light was flashed up and down three times.

"It's a signal!" cried Inavsky. "They have sent a runner ahead to notify them of our coming. I don't like this."

Evidently the dog drivers liked it, however.

They laid the whips upon their dogs in great shape and the sleds went flying over the frozen snow.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD RUIN IN THE FOREST.

"Ask him what it means, Inavsky. Ask him what house it is."

George was beginning to feel worried now and it took a good deal to worry him.

In the distance among the trees they could see a queer old stone building half in ruins, with a great fire burning in front of it.

There was no one near the fire and the whole place wore an air of gloom, which was anything but reassuring.

Inavsky tackled his driver again at George's suggestion, but it did no good.

The old Tunguese only grunted and shook his head. While before he had been able to speak Russian well enough, not a word would he utter now, and there was a fierce look in his ugly-face which none of the little party liked.

"You will have to give them some of your tricks again, boys," said Lelia. "If this don't turn out to be a Russian post-house, or I am very much mistaken."

"It certainly is a post-house," said Inavsky, "but I don't believe it is occupied now. I think you will find the old post-road to the Amoor just beyond it. The road used at present lies several versts to the eastward of this."

"Hello!" exclaimed George. "You speak as though you had been in this part of the country before."

"I have," replied Inavsky, and that was all he would say. In this, like everything else about himself, the Nihilist was an absolute sphinx.

As they drew near the old ruin the Russian-speaking driver turned suddenly upon Inavsky and said:

"You stay here until morning. To-morrow we go on. Get out by the fire and take your baskets out. This is where you are to sleep."

The teams were drawn up beside the fire then, but no one appeared to welcome them, and the drivers did not get off the sleds.

The boys got down and removed the baskets, Inavsky helping Lelia off the sled.

He had scarcely set his basket down upon the snow when both drivers gave a wild yell, then away flew the dogs into the darkness and the sleds were run out of sight.

Inavsky's language would not look well in print.

He swore a blue streak, as the saying goes.

"They have simply abandoned us, that's all," he declared. "They didn't want us in their village, so they brought us away off here, and now we can shift for ourselves."

Of course there was nothing to do but to make the best of it.

"At all events, we are away beyond the reach of the Czar's soldiers," said George, "and that's one good thing."

"I don't know whether we are or not," declared Inavsky. "I tell you, there is no end to the treachery of these Tunguese. There may be a troop stationed near to watch for escapes over the frontier. For all I know there may have been a mine opened somewhere around here since my time."

The first thing was to examine the old post-house.

George cut a piece off one of the branches of the nearest tree, which, being a pitch pine, burned freely, and they set out to examine the ruin.

It was absolutely deserted and there was nothing about the dirty rooms to indicate that it had been occupied in many years.

"I feel as though we were being watched," said Lelia, when they returned to the fire at last. "There was certainly some one here just before we came and I believe there is still."

"Let them watch," said George. "I'm going to have some supper. We have got grub enough and we may as well use it. Come on, Nat; lend a fellow a hand."

The fire was then replenished and soon a good meal of broiled venison, roasted on the end of a sharp stick, prepared.

This was eaten beside the fire, for it was getting colder, and there was a deadly chill in the old house.

But it would not do to sleep out of doors, so the boys built up a fire in the big fire-place in one of the lower rooms.

It was now growing late and as no one had shown themselves, Inavsky, Lelia and Nat lay down before the fire and went to sleep.

George remained on guard and it was arranged that he should arouse the Nihilist to take his place shortly after midnight.

It was dreary work watching; for the best part of two hours George paced up and down before the old post-house, stopping in the walk occasionally to replenish the fire.

Not a sound was heard, except the perpetual sighing of the wind through the tops of the tall pines.

Tired out at last, George sat down by the fire and leaned his head against the stone wall.

He had no intention of going to sleep, but that is exactly what he did. He was thoroughly tired, having had no sleep now for twenty-four hours; so there is no wonder that before the boy knew it he was off in the land of Nod.

How long he slept he never knew, but all at once he found himself wide awake and staring, and brought upon his feet by an awful yell, which rang out through the deserted rooms.

"Holy St. Michael, what is that?" cried Inavsky, starting up at the same instant, and both saw two hideous, ghastly figures appear in the open doorway—a sight which made their blood run cold.

CHAPTER XVI.

GEORGE'S GREAT SCHEME.

The sight in the doorway of the old post-house was certainly peculiar enough to startle any one.

There stood two figures, dressed in bear-skins, each holding a big club with a round knob on the end, all covered with smaller knobs and sharp spikes.

Instead of heads, perched upon the shoulders of each figure was a grinning skull, and around their necks were strings of bones and animals' teeth.

They stood there motionless and again the wild cry rang out, seeming to come from somewhere in the forest behind them.

Inavsky recovered himself in a moment.

"Tunguese medicine men trying to scare us!" he whispered. "Give them something, my boy."

George had arrived at the same conclusion himself, and was all ready.

Instantly he bent forward, and, putting his head between his legs, faced the two figures backward, at the same time uttering a yell which brought Nat and Lelia to their feet.

Lelia screamed, but Nat, catching sight of George, seemed to understand on the instant what the matter was.

Down went his head in the same way, and the two boys went waddling toward the figures in the doorway.

They had stood their ground until then, and perhaps it was their astonishment that made them do it, but as the boys came toward them they suddenly stepped back, uttering dismal groans.

George and Nat went straight on.

They expected to see the two ghost players take to their heels and run, and one did so, but the other, giving an awful yell, fell to the ground, writhing in a fit.

The pasteboard skull tumbled off, exhibiting the black head of a Tunguese beneath.

Meanwhile the other dashed away into the darkness of the forest on the other side of the trail.

The boys resumed the upright on the instant.

"I guess we have done the scaring this time," laughed George. "Is this a genuine fit or a fake?"

Inavsky, who had lighted the lantern, flashed it in the fellow's face and examined him closely.

He was quieter now and except for an occasional twitch of the whole body, lay perfectly still, foaming slightly at the mouth and muttering some unintelligible words.

"This is no fit," said the Nihilist. "By gracious, if I could only speak Tunguese I could show you strange things now."

"He's a shaman," said Lelia, "that's what he is."

"Of course," replied Inavsky. "He thought to play some trick on us, but he has fallen into the trap himself. Oh, I'd give a thousand roubles if I could only speak to him! We'd find out how far we are from the frontier then and whether we are being followed or not and everything else we want to know."

"I don't understand you at all," said George. "I wish you would explain."

"I certainly will. Keep your eyes on the forest while we are talking, boys. We may fully expect an attack."

"Hush!" breathed Lelia. "I see three or four figures hiding behind the trees. I certainly do. There's trouble ahead for us, and I don't see what is to be done."

"We'll go right for 'em!" said George. "Come on, Nat."

Among other things he could imitate the barking of a dog, the crowing of a cock and, in fact, the cries of half a dozen animals, and Nat, who had been practicing for some time under his direction, could do almost as well himself.

All in an instant the forest resounded with strange cries, which startled Inavsky and Lelia almost as much as they did the Tunguese.

There was one short, stumpy fellow who sprang out from behind a tree just in front of George. He ran well for a minute, when all at once his foot struck a stone and down he went flat on his face.

George pounced on him in an instant, and, clutching the collar of his fur coat, lifted him to his feet.

The fellow howled like a maniac and fought desperately for a moment.

But George had a firm grip on him and as he dragged him back to the post-house the Tunguese stopped struggling and began to whine, begging in Russian that the "great shaman" would spare his life.

"Hello!" cried Inavsky. "Good for you, George! We have got an interpreter. Now I'll show you something which will astonish you. Let me talk."

He commenced to rattle away to the Tunguese in Russian, speaking so rapidly that George could not make out a word.

"It's all right," he said in a moment. "They think you are great shamans and that is why they came here. He says that there is treasure supposed to be hidden in the old post-house and they followed us here from the Tunguese village. Their idea was to capture you two and through you find the hidden treasure. It is something their shamans have never been equal to, but they thought they might be able to succeed through you."

"Blest if I understand what you mean at all," said George. "I wish you would explain."

"I'm going to now," replied Inavsky. "You know what hypnotism is, of course. Don't tell me you don't believe in it. Hypnotism is an admitted scientific fact."

"I didn't say that I did not believe in it," replied George. "I suppose there is something in it, but I don't see what it has to do with us."

"Perhaps not, but Peter has undoubtedly told these fellows that you were great shamans. Now, all these shamans go into the hypnotic trance. They don't wait for any one to hypnotize them. They do it to themselves and then they talk and

answer questions and tell all sorts of strange things. Probably they thought that you could do the same and that you might be able to tell where the hidden treasure lies. At all events that's as near as I can come to it from what this fellow says."

"By thunder! I see a way out of our troubles through this!" exclaimed George.

"I can't understand you at all," said the Nihilist.

"No, but you will when I show you. Will you promise to do just as I say?"

Inavsky hesitated.

"Do it," said Lelia. "George knows what he is about."

"You had better," added Nat. "Don't go back on George and you can just bet he will carry you through."

George himself said nothing. There was a merry twinkle in his eyes in spite of the seriousness of the situation, for if there was anything he dearly loved it was a joke, and he thought he could see his way to a good one now.

"I'm willing," said Inavsky, "only I would like to give a little exhibition of Tunguese shamanism first. These shamans who throw themselves into trances are really wonderful. I have seen them do some very remarkable things in my time."

"Go ahead," said George, "only first do as I tell you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Make that fellow understand that Nat and I really are great shamans; that we can tell them just where the buried treasure is hidden and that we will do it if the whole band will come right up here and show themselves without fear. They must bring back the dog sleds and have everything ready for a start, for we shall want to be on the move just as soon as we give away the secret. You understand?"

"I think I do," said Inavsky, "but we are running a great risk."

"Leave it all to me. Will you do what I say?"

Inavsky consented and while he began talking to the prisoner in Russian, George turned to Nat, and, drawing him aside, whispered to him for a few moments.

"Right," said Nat. "We'll give these Tunguese a little vaudeville show that will surprise them. I think it can be done all right."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHITE SHAMANS SURPRISE THE TUNGUESE.

While all this was going on the Tunguese lay in a deep trance.

"I've explained to this fellow and he says they will all come, if you will promise not to throw the evil eye on them or hurt them in any way," said Inavsky.

"You promised, of course?" replied George.

"Certainly I did."

"Then why don't he go after his friends?"

"I want my show first, George. I believe in this sort of thing," said the Nihilist, and he spoke so earnestly that George had not a word of objection to make.

Inavsky now stepped up to the shaman and said something in Russian to the prisoner which George did not catch.

The Tunguese called to the shaman in a loud voice.

Inavsky in a low voice translated the conversation which followed into English and we shall give it all just as though it had taken place in that tongue.

"Speak! Speak! Speak!" said the Tunguese.

"I will speak now," replied the shaman, without opening his eyes or changing his position. "I am waiting to speak. Why do you keep me waiting so?"

"Are we being followed?" asked Inavsky. "Look back and tell me what you see."

"I see men on horses," replied the shaman. "There are ten of them. They are Russians. They are riding into our village. They have come around the mountain with the hole in it. They are looking for you and your friends. They are asking our chief which way you went. If they capture you they will take you back to a place where the post-house was destroyed by fire."

"As I thought. We are being followed," muttered Inavsky. "I was sure they would not let me go." Then he added aloud:

"Does the chief tell them which way we went?"

"He does."

"And they are still following us?"

"They are just riding out of the village now, but it is a long road. It will take them some time to get here."

"Leave those people," said Inavsky. "Look ahead along the road to the river. Do you see any soldiers in our way?"

"This will take time," replied the shaman. "Wait."

He was silent for a moment and then said:

"I have been all along the road, but I cannot see any Russian soldiers until you come to the river. They are there at the post-house by the ferry. I do not see how you are going to get across."

"Enough," said Inavsky. "You may wake now."

"Do you believe all that?" asked George, as Inavsky ceased to speak.

"Implicitly," replied the Nihilist. "If there was time I could prove the wonderful powers of this man to you. I could make him tell you your whole past history in a way that would amaze you; but since we are being followed, you had better undertake your work, for there is no time to be lost."

As Inavsky thus spoke the shaman opened his eyes and began staring around. The moment he caught sight of the boys he sprang to his feet and ran like a deer into the forest, the Tunguese prisoner bursting into a gruff laugh at the haste which he made.

"He is afraid of the white shamans," he said.

"After him!" cried Inavsky. "Bring them all back just as I tell you and the white shamans will show you where the buried treasure is hidden."

The Tunguese needed no second bidding, but was gone in a minute.

"Will they come?" said Lelia. "I am wondering."

"So am I," replied Inavsky. "If they don't we had better take to the woods at once, for it is just as sure that we are being followed as that we are standing here. Do you believe me, boys?"

"I can't say whether I do or not," replied George. "I don't know anything about Tunguese magic, but as you say you do, I am willing to take your word for it. What I am wondering is, whether they will come or not."

"And what I am wondering is how many dog sleds they have," said Nat. "If there's more than the three we are in the soup."

"I can manage one," said Lelia. "I think I can guess your plan."

"Here they come!" exclaimed Inavsky. "They take stock in the white shamans, which is more than I do. Now, then, boys, see what you can do."

The Tunguese were slowly emerging from the forest and gathering around the door of the old post-house.

There were as many as forty of them and with their big fur coats and queer hats they looked a strange lot. Most of them were armed with long spears and it was certainly running a great risk on the part of the boys to put themselves in their power; but George and Nat faced this queer audience as calmly as they had faced more intelligent ones many a time before.

The Tunguese who had been the interpreter came up to Inavsky and said:

"We are here, my lord. Is it the will of the white shamans to begin?"

"It is not," replied Inavsky, loftily. "Where are the dog sleds? Until they come we can do nothing. You call the white men dogs. Well, so we are. Our shamans draw their power from dogs. Let the dogs come and we will begin."

George and Nat stood together with faces as grave as judges. Inavsky was simply carrying out what George had told him to do in case the dogs did not come.

The headmen of the Tunguese consulted together and then went back into the woods and, after a few moments, six dog teams were driven up.

Two were those which had been stolen from the boys and with the other four no doubt some of the Tunguese had followed the party from the village to the old post-house.

Everything was now in readiness for the boys to try their great experiment.

"We may be able to bluff them. I don't know," George whispered to Nat. "Anyhow, it is better than having a fight."

Inavsky and Lelia had their instructions and they now took up their positions near the dog teams.

George and Nat advanced toward the Tunguese and, suddenly throwing themselves backward, stood on their hands with their feet in the air, and walked about on the snow among the dogs, startling the animals not a little. Indeed, it gave several of the Tunguese all they could do to keep them quiet.

Then other contortionist tricks were performed, some of which were really quite clever.

Inavsky, through the interpreter, told the Tunguese not to be afraid and that in a few moments the white shamans would have drawn power enough from the dogs to be able to tell where the buried treasure was hidden.

As soon as he saw that he had them all well interested, George was ready for business and he and Nat walked over near the door of the old post-house, the Tunguese gathering around him, some holding blazing pine knots, which threw light on the weird scene.

Inavsky came up and stood beside them, but Lelia remained near the sleds.

Nat now began his part of the work.

He made a series of fantastic passes over George's head with his hands.

George winked rapidly and began to twitch his arms and legs just as he had seen the shaman do.

Presently he closed his eyes and seemed to sleep, although still standing up before Nat.

"The white shaman does not fall down as the Tunguese shaman does!" called out Inavsky and the interpreter explained.

Nat then began to talk. What he said need not be repeated here, for it was only a lot of nonsense; but Inavsky translated it to the audience in quite a different way, telling them that these were the two most wonderful shamans on earth and that they could locate buried treasure anywhere it happened to be and never fail.

"They can make the spirit which guards the treasure speak right out from the place," announced the Nihilist, at last. "The spirit speaks three times and says: 'Here I am! Here I am! Here I am!' If the hiding place of the treasure is immediately attacked then and you keep right at it until the treasure is exposed the spirit will always leave it, but if the work is stopped the treasure will vanish and the spirit never speak again."

This was Inavsky's little speech and when he paused, Nat waved his hand dramatically and snapped his fingers three times in George's face.

Immediately a deep voice called out inside the post-house:

"Here I am! Here I am! Here I am!"

"Now!" shouted Inavsky. "Go for the treasure! Once more the spirit will speak and this time from the very place!"

And again, this time from a certain spot against the crumbling stone wall, the voice called out:

"Here I am! Here I am! Here I am!"

The Tunguese threw themselves into their work like so many wild beasts, pushing and crowding, each trying to get a chance to use the sharp sticks and bits of iron with which they had come provided, to pry out the stones from the wall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHASED BY WHITE WOLVES.

"Now is our time, Inavsky," whispered Nat. "Move over toward the sleds. Is there anybody left behind me? Is there any one looking after the dogs?"

Nat did not dare to look around himself and as for George it would have spoiled all for him to have opened his eyes then.

"It's all right," replied Inavsky. "You are a splendid ventriloquist, George. By thunder, you did that well!"

"Ready, then," said Nat, and all three made a dash for the dog sleds.

Lelia sprang upon one, Inavsky on another and the boys each took theirs.

Away the sleds flew like lightning over the frozen snow, disappearing in the dark forest.

As the start was made Inavsky with the long dog whip lashed the dogs of the remaining two sleds and sent them flying off.

To describe the scene which followed at the old post-house would be next to impossible.

Many of the Tunguese comprehended that they had been fooled and, rushing out, yelling like demons, sent their spears flying after the fugitives, at the same time giving chase over the frozen snow; but others, still believing in the white shamans, stuck to their work at the stones.

"We are right in it!" cried Inavsky. "Keep it up, boys; keep it up! They never can overtake us now."

On they flew, the shouts of the Tunguese growing fainter and fainter behind them.

At last they suddenly emerged from the forest and came out upon a broad steppe without trees, which Inavsky declared stretched away to the Amoor River.

"It must be a good twenty English miles away from us yet," he added. "If we can only make it before the troops overtake us, I shall be thankful, but I have my doubts."

"So you still believe in your shaman?" remarked George. They had slackened speed and the four sleds were running side by side now.

"Of course I do," replied Inavsky. "I believe in that troop of soldiers following us just as firmly as the Tunguese believed in the treasure in the wall before we made that rush for the sleds. Hark! What was that?"

A short, sharp bark was heard behind them.

"The other dogs," said Nat. "I can't see them, though."

"I'm afraid that is no dog," said Lelia, turning pale.

"Indeed it isn't," said Inavsky. "That's a wolf fast enough."

A dismal howl was heard even as he spoke and the barking came again and again and soon they saw a troop of at least twenty white animals not much larger than the dogs they were driving coming rapidly after them over the snow.

George and Nat had not spoken a word for some moments now.

They knew nothing about wolves and they took it for granted that Inavsky knew all about them. Indeed, they did not realize their danger until the Nihilist spoke.

"We are in for it," he said. "I don't see that there is any help for us, Lelia, do you?"

"We must let one team go and it had better be mine," replied the brave girl, quietly. "My hands are so cold and benumbed now that I can hardly hold the reins."

"Will they overtake us?" asked Nat.

"They certainly will," replied Inavsky. "They are the white wolves and those are the most dangerous kind of all. There is no escaping them. Some of the dogs must go to feed them, that's all."

He pulled in as he spoke and Lelia stopping, too, sprang off her sled and climbed upon his.

The wolves gave wild yelps as they saw this movement.

They seemed to comprehend exactly what it meant.

So did the dogs which were to be abandoned.

The poor creatures howled dismally and made frantic efforts to keep up with Inavsky's sled.

George and Nat pulled in a little to let the other sleds come up to them and then away they all went flying at full speed again.

The wolves increased their speed also and so did the abandoned dogs.

These went off to the right and ran for their lives.

The wolves went flying past the sleds a moment later. Their tongues were lolling out and they were yelping savagely.

Inavsky and the boys struck at them with their whips and they sheered off and, overtaking the dogs, sprang upon them furiously, throwing the poor brutes down and tearing them to pieces in a manner awful to witness, but the chase was stopped for the time being and the sleds went flying on.

"It will only be for a short time," said Inavsky, dismally. "You will be amazed when you see how soon they will finish up those four dogs and be after us again."

"How far do you suppose we have come?" George called out from the other sled.

"About ten miles, which leaves us as much farther to go," replied Inavsky and as he spoke the sharp crack of a rifle was heard behind them.

"Holy St. Michael! That's worse than the wolves! The troops are upon us!" shouted the Nihilist, rising in his seat.

But the steppes were rolling here and there and when the boys looked back they could see nothing.

"On! On! Faster! Faster!" yelled Inavsky and he brought the whip down over his dogs with a resounding crack which sent them bounding ahead over the snow.

was coming," replied the Nihilist. "On account of the roll of the steppes you can't see them sitting down. They are firing at the wolves. We have escaped one danger only to run into another; but with the help of the holy St. Michael we are going to escape this, too."

As he spoke, the Nihilist urged his dogs forward, dashed in ahead of George and Nat, and turned abruptly to the left.

George instantly followed him. He saw what the movement meant.

This part of the steppe was badly "cradled," that is, it was very rolling. There was a rise, then a deep depression, then another rise.

Some of the cradles were so deep that a man on horseback could easily hide in one.

The way of our travelers had led them across the cradles thus far.

Now Inavsky started to run through one of the cradles.

The snow was packed down and frozen so hard that the sled runners left no imprint.

To the Nihilist it looked very doubtful if the Czar's soldiers had yet seen them, and he determined that they should not catch sight of them if he could help it.

Their chance lay in the delay of the wolves. Several shots now rang out. The troops were making it hot for the wolves, evidently.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" shouted Inavsky. "This is our last chance!"

They covered a mile along the cradle in short order.

Then Inavsky, who still held the lead, cut across to the next cradle, and ran another mile along that.

All this was done without a word from the Nihilist as to his plans.

At last he drew rein on the dogs, and, looking back for perhaps the twentieth time, exclaimed:

"Well, boys, I think we have given them the slip all right. Now for the river!"

"We have a lot of time," said George. "If they have kept on to the river they must be half way there by this."

"Let them get there," replied Inavsky. "They are going to the ferry—we are not. Don't you worry. It means more than death to be caught, and I don't intend that any such thing shall happen. Now then, off we go!"

It was over the cradles again then. The dogs seemed never to tire, and really made splendid time.

When they crossed the third ridge from the point where this conversation took place they saw in the distance a band of mounted men galloping rapidly southward.

As far as George could make out, they were not discovered, and in a moment they were down in a cradle again. When they came up on the next rise the men had disappeared.

No further adventures occurred before reaching the Amoor River, nor did they see a solitary soul, not even a wandering Tunguese.

Inavsky seemed to have chosen his road well, for the country appeared to be utterly deserted.

The feelings experienced by George and Nat as they approached the mighty river which divides Siberia from the great Chinese Empire were certainly peculiar.

But such a thing as escaping from the clutches of the Czar, once a convict is actually in Siberia, is a thing almost unknown, and even in China it was doubtful if they would not be arrested and sent back.

"There you are!" cried Inavsky, as they came out upon a rise and caught sight of the river at last. "That's China over there! Would that we were on the other side of that water. Then we might begin to think we were safe."

The river seemed to be about a mile across. On both sides there was a line of ice, but there was a broad channel of swiftly running water in the middle.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTURING THE RIVER GUARD.

"Are they there, Inavsky?" asked Nat. "Do you see the soldiers?"

"Yes, they are there, and just the number the shaman said

"What are you going to do to get across?" asked Lelia. "You men could swim, perhaps, but I can't. I see no chance for me."

"Of course we are not going to desert you," said Inavsky. "Wait! Wait! I want time to think. Where is the ferry? Oh, I see it there! Look, boys! There are the troops!"

Inavsky waved his hand toward the west.

Far in the distance a cluster of buildings could be seen on the shore. The Russian flag was flying from one of them, and on the opposite shore there were other buildings; from the roof of one of these the three-cornered yellow dragon flag of China waved.

"That's the last place on earth we want to get to," said Inavsky. "I was thinking, George, that we might drive our sleds right out on the ice as far as it is safe to go, and there unhitch the dogs, rig up some kind of a mast to one of the sleds, put up a bearskin for a sail, and in that way get across."

"It's running an awful risk," said George, "but the thing is possible, and I can see no other way."

"That's just what I was thinking of," declared Nat. "My idea is that it could be done, for the wind is behind us, and it is blowing pretty strong, too."

"Wait! We are discovered!" cried Lelia. "Look there!"

She pointed down to the river bank about half a mile beyond the point their position overlooked.

Two men stood on the bank. They were running the Russian flag up a tall pole which had not been observed by the fugitives until now.

Inavsky groaned in despair. "I see our finish in this," he declared. "I'm afraid there is to be escape for us. Look over to the ferry! Yes, it is as I feared!"

The flag on the ferry house was dipped twice in answer to the signal given by the two men who were now looking up at them.

A few minutes later they all saw a troop of soldiers leave the ferry buildings and ride toward them along the shore.

"We are lost!" exclaimed Inavsky, gloomily. "There is about as much chance now of our escaping across the Amoor as there is of our flying to the moon."

"I shall kill myself before I'll be taken," said Lelia, decidedly. "I'll run out on the ice and jump into the water. I have had a taste of freedom, and I will never go to the mines now! Never! On that I am resolved!"

"Don't say it," said George. "We Americans don't do business that way. While there is life there is hope. Inavsky, I believe there is still a chance for us to get across."

"How?" demanded the Nihilist. "I wish you would explain."

"Take the bull by the horns. In other words, drive straight for the guard. Probably those two are all of them. We will all four get on one sled. Nat and I will hide under the bearskins, and when we show ourselves we will give them such a scare that they will be glad to come to terms."

Inavsky did not speak for a moment.

"That is certainly our only chance," he said, at last. "And the chances are they have a boat down there, and, of course, there is a house in under the bank. If we could get their arms away from them there is no telling what we might not be able to do."

"You will try it, then?" asked George.

"Yes," said the Nihilist. "I'll try it."

"How long a time do you suppose we have got?"

"Less than half an hour. We may have that. They are coming pretty fast."

"Then here goes!" cried George. "We will sneak in under the bearskins now. If there are only two men down there we ought to be good for them. If there are more, it is good-by to all hope."

It was a gloomy outlook surely, but still there was a fighting chance.

Lashing his dogs furiously, Inavsky started for the river bank, while the dogs attached to the other sleds, not liking the idea of being abandoned, came trotting on behind.

CHAPTER XX.

CROSSING THE AMOOR.

There were only two men guarding this point on the river front. Col. Michelsky was one and Ivan Roff, his assistant, the other.

On either side of the different ferries across the Amoor at this part of the Siberian boundary such guards are stationed not so much on account of escaping convicts, for escapes are very rare, as to be on the lookout for tea smugglers from the Chinese shore.

Inavsky knew this, but he thought he had gone sufficiently to the eastward to avoid the guards, while the event proved that he had not.

Col. Michelsky, an ignorant, pompous officer, the most of whose life had been spent in Siberia, saw the party when they first drove out upon the bluff. He never suspected them of being convicts, but he did think they were smugglers, so he made haste to give the signal to the ferry guard. When he saw the foremost sled turn and start down the slope, he thought that he must have been mistaken, and that these were only travelers who had lost their way.

On they came, and the gallant colonel was not a little puzzled to make out what had become of the other two members of the party, for he was certain that he had seen four persons, and now only two were visible, and here were the other teams following on without drivers or riders.

Col. Michelsky, who had been applying himself freely to the vodka bottle that morning, could not understand it at all, and having told Ivan Rouff that he must be drunk when the fellow declared that there was nobody on the other two sleds, he went into the guard-house and took another big horn of vodka in the hope that it would make him see straighter. Then taking his rifle, he came out again just in time to see the sled driven by Inavsky come dashing down the hill.

"Halt!" cried the colonel, in his best Russian. "Halt, and give an account of yourself. What do wish here?"

Inavsky never answered a word. Neither did Lelia, but both sprang off the sled and threw up their arms, each giving a wild cry.

"Holy St. Michael! What, then, is the matter with you?" cried the colonel. "Are you both mad?"

He was thinking of delirium tremens when he spoke, and it is safe to say that Ivan had the same idea in his head, for both had been playing cards and drinking vodka all night.

They thought more about that unpleasant complaint a second later, when the bearskins on the sled were suddenly thrown aside and two boys stepped off backward, with their heads turned so that they faced the two guards.

Ivan Rouff gave a yell of terror, while the colonel blurted out something in Russian which, being translated into good American, meant "got 'em again!"

This was Inavsky's chance, and he took it.

Throwing himself upon Col. Michelsky, he snatched his rifle away and presented it at the man's head, while Lelia, as quick as lightning seized Ivan's rifle, which he dropped in his fright, and, taking to his heels, ran into the guard-house and slammed the door.

"Stand where you are! Do as we tell you or you die!" shouted Inavsky.

George had the colonel by the throat then, and Nat, snatching the rifle away from Lelia, broke into the guard-house and soon had Ivan just where he wanted him.

The whole thing was accomplished so quickly that the two men were at the mercy of the Nihilist and his companions before they realized what it all meant.

It was Inavsky's time to act now, and he lost no time doing it, rattling off his Russian so rapidly that the boys could not understand one word.

"Is there a boat?" demanded George, anxiously. "I can't make out what you say."

"There are two," replied Inavsky. "One large and one smaller one. It is all right."

"What language do you speak?" stammered the colonel. "Who are you? What does this mean?"

"We are English. Refuse to help us if you dare!" retorted Inavsky. "I have told you what you must do. Get out the boats. We must cross at once."

"It is impossible now. In half an hour the wind will go down, and then——"

"Dog! You mean mischief. In half an hour the guard from the ferry will be here to stop us! Get out the boats now! We must cross at once! Refuse to help us, and we will lay you both dead upon the snow!"

Col. Michelsky swore in Russian, but with his own rifle in the hands of a desperate man, and aimed at his head, what was he to do?

"This will cost me my position, and probably my life," he growled. "I see what you are now. You are escaped convicts. I had better be dead than have this misfortune happen to me. Still, you have me in your power, and I suppose it must be as you say."

And so it was. The fight was fairly won, and there was no further attempt at opposition on the part of the guard.

The two boats were now drawn out of a boat-house down under the bank of the river.

One was a fairly good-sized boat, but it was not large enough to hold them all, and Inavsky insisted that Col. Michelsky and Ivan should go with them, for he felt more than doubtful about his own ability to navigate the boats across the channel between the ice fields with the wind blowing as it was.

"You two and Lelia can go in the big boat with this man," he said, pointing to the colonel. "I will follow with the other. It is the only safe way."

Both boats were shod with a steel runner fastened along the keel, so that they could be drawn out on the ice.

Lelia now took back the rifle and Inavsky acting as guard on one side, she did the same on the other, while the boys and the two Russians started to pull the boats out over the ice.

They had scarcely started when the mounted guard came in sight in the distance.

Evidently they guessed what had happened, for they set up a wild shout, and, turning suddenly, rode down the bank onto the ice.

"That settles you!" growled the colonel.

"Faster! Faster!" cried Inavsky. "It may settle us, but it settles you, too, for we shall kill you both just as soon as we find there is no escape!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE JOSS HOUSE IN THE FOREST.

The water was running like a mill-race and the channel was full of great black rocks, which doubled the danger of crossing the Amoor with the wind blowing off the Siberian shore a perfect gale.

"We are here," said Inavsky, "and now that we are here, I'm afraid that our chances of escape are pretty slim."

"It's a frightful risk to run," said Col. Michelsky, but I wouldn't attempt to cross myself, but what am I to do to make you understand the risk?"

"Don't let's talk!" exclaimed Lelia. "Oh, don't let's talk!

Look! They are close upon us! It is either that or death, for I will never live to be taken. I will throw myself into the river first."

"In with the boats!" cried George. "There has been too much time wasted in talking already! In with the boats, or we shall all have to jump in and swim across."

They had reached the farthest point on the ice to which it was safe to go, and the Czar's troops were now almost within rifle range, and advancing rapidly.

Of course the horses could not come up to where the fugitives were, but there was nothing to hinder the soldiers coming on foot.

In a moment they might expect to hear the rifles crack, and to have the shots come flying towards them. Haste was indeed a matter of life or death.

Seizing one of the oars, George reversed it, and, by striking hard, managed to break away the ice in front of the boat.

Col. Michelsky helped him with another oar, and Ivan and Nat did as much for the smaller boat.

They then pushed the boats into the water, and all jumped in.

"Don't ask us to row!" pleaded the colonel. "We have to come back again. We cannot live in China. Treat us as prisoners. Be merciful enough for that."

"That's reasonable, and we will do it," replied George, seizing an oar. "Guard this man, Lelia! Shoot him if he makes a move!"

Nat was ready with the other oar by this time, and the boat shot off into the channel.

Inavsky and Ivan quickly followed, the latter doing the rowing.

"Stop! Stop, there! Stop, or we will shoot you without mercy!" shouted the leader of the Czar's troops.

They had shouted many times, but these were the first words the boys were able to understand.

The open channel was only about a hundred feet across, but the wind did not blow exactly across the river. Instead of that, it came in a slanting direction, and was taking them down stream.

Strong hands and stout hearts! Two plucky Yankee boys who did not know what it was to give up!

This was the state of affairs in the larger boat, but poor Inavsky's fix was a bad one, for he could not row and stand guard.

Ivan had no desire to pull the boat across to the Chinese shore.

Now the firing began. The mounted troops had advanced as far as they dared; they lined up, and, turning their rifles upon the escaped convicts, blazed away.

George's heart was in his mouth, so to speak, for the first round proved that the Czar's troops were entirely within range.

The bullets came whizzing past their heads, yet nobody ducked down but Col. Michelsky. The boys just set their teeth and pulled the harder, and Lelia never said a word.

Again the rifles cracked, and then again, a third round following close upon the second.

From Inavsky's boat a wild cry rang out, and the man Ivan dropped his oars and fell back. Inavsky made a wild effort to seize the oars, but failed.

"It's all up with me, boys!" he shouted, despairingly. "Look out for Lelia! Save yourselves!"

As he thus spoke the swift running current seized his boat, and sent it flying down the Amoor among the rocks.

"Inavsky! Inavsky!" screamed Lelia. She would have thrown herself into the water, but Nat prevented her.

"Good-by!" shouted George.

"Good-by! Heaven bless you!" came the answer, feebly heard against the wind.

"He can never escape, and I'm glad of it," growled Col. Michelsky.

"Say that again, and I'll kill you!" screamed Lelia, striking him on the head with the barrel of his own rifle with such force that nothing but the fur cap which he wore saved him from a fractured skull.

Again the rifles cracked, but this time the bullets fell into the water.

The boat was out of range at last, and inside of five minutes they ran hard up against the ice which extended out from the Chinese shore.

Col. Michelsky had not spoken a word since Lelia struck him. In obedience to George's command, he seized one pair of oars, while George sprang out and helped Lelia onto the ice.

Nat immediately followed. The troops on the opposite side of the channel watched their movements, but made no sign, for where was the use?

"Well, you are safe, but I'm doomed to go to the mines," groaned the Russian. "At least leave me my rifle so that I can shoot myself. It is better for me to die than to go back over there."

In the bottom of his heart George was sincerely sorry for the wretched man, but of course he could not comply with his request.

Waiting for nothing further, all ran off over the ice toward the high banks about a quarter of a mile away.

They could see nothing of Inavsky now. The boat had entirely disappeared.

Lelia was silently weeping. The poor girl seemed to feel terribly.

George tried to comfort her the best he could, but of course there was little that he could say to make her feel any better.

The last they saw of Col. Michelsky he was pulling back across the channel to meet his fate.

Reaching the bank, they climbed up the best they could, Lelia falling twice on its hard, slippery side.

"China at last!" cried George. "Oh, Nat, what lies before us now?"

"Well, here's woods right before us," said Nat, who was nothing if not practical, "and the sooner we get into them the better, I say."

A dense forest came down almost to the bank of the river.

There was not a house in sight, or any sign of life, but before they had advanced a hundred yards they came suddenly upon a clearing in the middle of which stood an octagonal building made of porcelain tiles of various colors, and hung all over with queerly-shaped bells.

"A joss house!" cried Nat. "That's what it is. What's the matter with Lelia? Catch her, George, quick!"

George was just in time to seize the fainting girl in his strong arms.

"It has been too much for her," he gasped. "She will die if we don't do something. Come on, Nat! We must take her inside there, whatever we go up against."

George lifted the poor girl bodily and staggered toward the porcelain tower, Nat going ahead with the rifle grasped in his hand.

They had almost reached it, when a wild clash of gongs broke the silence, and inside the tower they heard a hundred voices yelling like mad.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE HEAD OF THE WAR GOD.

The situation of George and Nat had now become almost too trying to be endured.

With Lelia fainting on their hands and the joss-house in the forest full of Chinamen, as George saw must be the case, it was really very hard to know what to do.

Something had to be done pretty quick, however; in her present condition Lelia was liable to die, for, to make matters worse, it had now begun to snow again.

The wind had blown in a regular blizzard, and this made the situation ten times more serious than it otherwise would have been.

Meanwhile the clashing gongs continued, and the chorus of voices shouted louder than ever, and yet not a soul was to be seen anywhere around the porcelain pagoda.

"We must get Lelia under cover, no matter what happens," panted George, as he staggered on with his burden. "Nat, you go ahead and see what you can strike."

"It's what will strike us, I am thinking," replied Nat. "To go in there among that howling mob can't mean any good to us."

He ran on as he spoke, and by the time George had come up to the tower Nat had some information to impart that was worth listening to.

"This way, George! This way!" he whispered mysteriously. "I've struck the very place. It may be the death of us in the end, but it will do the business at present all right."

There was a low door close to where Nat stood. It was down at the bottom of a short flight of steps, and led into the tower.

"Have you tried it?" panted George.

"Yes, I have been inside. Didn't you see me come out?"

"Didn't see anything, this snow blinds me so. Is it all right in there?"

"Yes, come on! Now is our time while there is nobody in the room."

Not fully understanding what this meant, George staggered on through the door which Nat threw open, and found himself in a snug little room where a fire of glowing coals burned in a tall brazier.

It was just the place for the emergency, as Nat had said.

There was a handsome rug spread over the floor, and a low bamboo couch covered with soft pillows drawn up against the brazier. On this George made haste to lay Lelia down, straightening himself up with a sigh of relief.

"Is she dead?" asked Nat, greatly alarmed.

"No, no!" replied George. "I don't think it is anything more than a faint. See, she is opening her eyes now. How do you feel, Lelia? Are you better? Speak to us! Poor thing! She has suffered so much. She is all worn out, Nat. Oh, I wish there was something I could give her!"

"What's in this bottle, I wonder?" exclaimed Nat, going over to a little table where a wicker flask and several pretty porcelain cups stood.

He drew the cork out and put the bottle to his nose.

"This smells all right, George," he said. "It's some kind of good stuff, sure."

"Liquor?"

"Yes."

"Let's taste it. Pour some out."

Nat poured a little of the liquor into one of the cups. It was white and sweet. Then he put it to his lips.

"Samschu!" he exclaimed. "I have tasted this before."

"What's samschu?" asked George.

"Rice brandy. It's all right. Let's take the chances and give her a little."

They did it, mixing the stuff with water, of which there was plenty in an earthen jar.

Lelia drank the contents of the cup feebly, and it instantly revived her.

"Boys, where am I?" she asked. "Oh, I feel so weak! Poor Inavsky! This has almost killed me. You did not know it, but he was my husband. This is a judgment on me for not being more careful. It was I who lured you to this dreadful fate!"

Then she began crying and moaning in a way dreadful to listen to, which was all very hard for the boys.

"So Inavsky was your husband!" exclaimed George, when she at length grew calm. "Well, I guessed it. But don't despair. I think there is more than a fighting chance for him. The boat didn't upset. He may escape; there's a thousand ways in which it could come about. Now, Lelia, you lie here for a moment, while we investigate, and try to find out where we are. Our very lives may depend upon it. You are not afraid to stay alone?"

"Oh, no," replied the poor girl. "I'm not afraid. Go on. I know it is necessary. In a few moments I shall be stronger; meanwhile just let me lie here."

The boys immediately went out into the passage and started upon their dangerous task.

The noise overhead still continued. There was the same clashing of gongs and wild chorus of many voices.

It was too dark in the passage to see much, but George had the matches, and he immediately lighted one, discovering a narrow and very steep flight of steps leading up into the tower.

"This is our way, Nat. Come on!" he whispered. "It may lead us to our death, but I'm going straight ahead."

Thus saying, George crept softly up the stairs, lighting matches as he went, until he brought up against a little door not over three feet high.

The din was deafening now. Whatever it was all about was certainly close to them. Trying the door and finding it unfastened, the boys passed through it, finding themselves inside of a great hollow mass of metal of most irregular shape.

Here the sounds of the clashing gongs reverberated to that extent that it was impossible to hear oneself speak.

George struck another match and stared around.

Then the truth flashed upon him. He was inside of some great image. Light came through three holes here. One was the mouth, the other two the eyes. He tried to tell his discovery to Nat, who was right behind him on the ladder, but the din was so dreadful that he could not make him hear.

Going up a step higher, George peered out through one of the eye-holes, and saw a great crowd of Chinamen kneeling upon the floor of a circular room.

They were all shouting and yelling at the top of their lungs, while in front, at the foot of the altar upon which the idol stood, was a row of boys beating furiously upon great brass gongs.

And this was not all. The cause of the uproar was apparent enough, for there, standing in front of the altar, with their hands tied behind them, were five men and two women. The men wore the dress of clergymen. They were evidently missionaries, and it was equally plain that Chinamen were about to kill them in honor of their heathen gods.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RESCUE OF THE MISSIONARIES.

"Well, what do you think of it all, Nat?"

"It's a hard show for us, George, that's one thing sure."

At the base of the image, which was a great bronze representation of the Chinese war god, resting upon a high platform, there was a little door similar to the one in the back of the image through which the boys had come.

Nat opened it a little way, and George saw that it led out upon the platform.

"Shut it, quick!" he whispered. "We can do it. Only thing is, we can't make them understand. Perhaps, though, they will take it for a warning, and let the missionaries go. That's our only hope."

"All right," said Nat. "Anything to break the monotony. Hadn't we better go back and have a look at Lelia first?"

George accepted this suggestion, and they returned to the lit-

tle room below, finding everything just as they had left it, with Lelia in a deep sleep.

"The coast is as clear as it will ever be," said George. "Come ahead, Nat. We will make our strike now."

The same silence prevailed when they got inside the war god. George crept up the ladder and peered out through the eye.

The Chinamen were still kneeling in prayer, and the missionaries stood huddled together, guarded by six men with drawn swords. They looked the picture of despair.

The time had come for George to make his first move. Putting his lips to the mouth-hole of the image, as many a sly old priest had done before him in ages gone by, no doubt, he shouted out: "Hello; Hello! Hello!"

Every man was on his feet in an instant. There was a great jabbering in Chinese, and all eyes were turned upon the image of the war god.

"You want to let those people go!" bellowed George. "If you don't lightning will strike your old joss-house and kill every mother's son of you? Do you hear that, you fellow dogs!"

Without waiting to see what the effect of this announcement was upon the audience, George came down the ladder, and an instant later the congregation in the joss-house were treated to a free turn by the celebrated Zimerini Brothers, for out upon the platform two waddling figures suddenly appeared, with their heads between their legs, shaking their fists at the frightened Chinamen, who made a break for the door of the temple, screaming and yelling and tumbling over each other in their anxiety to escape the vengeance of their gods.

In less time than it takes to tell it the missionaries were left alone in the joss-house, and the porcelain tower was surrounded by a howling mob of Chinamen, running about madly in the snow.

Of course there was great excitement among the prisoners, too.

One—an old man in the dress of a Catholic priest—came toward the platform, calling out in English:

"Away, you evil ones! Begone!"

"No hard words, mister!" cried George. "We have risked our lives to save you! If you want to escape you must join us, and not fight against us!"

With this George jumped off the platform, and, whipping out his knife, cut the bonds of all the prisoners.

"We are only two American contortionists, and no evil ones, my good, sir," exclaimed George, as he worked.

The situation was too pressing to admit any argument, and the missionaries followed George up on the platform, and Nat led them through the little door into the big bronze war god.

A few moments later all were gathered in the little room below, which belonged, as they afterward learned, to the head priest of the joss-house, where they found Lelia wide awake and quite her old self again.

Of course she was greatly surprised at this sudden influx of people, and listened eagerly to the explanation from Nat.

A council of war was immediately held.

George explained to the Rev. Mr. Pendergast who and what they were.

"I see but little hope of our escaping," said the missionary, "but if help comes you three shall pass as our friends, and take your chances with us. Father Doronsky here, who is a Russian missionary of the Greek church, will surely help us. Is it not so, father? You will not betray these unfortunate ones if the troops should come?"

The white-haired old Russian priest, to whom these remarks were addressed, promptly assured the boys that he would stand by them.

Then came the question of what move they ought to make.

The only hope was in the arrival of the Russian troops, some

of the native converts having been sent across the Amoor to implore their aid.

From the description of the place to which they had gone George saw only too clearly that it must be the ferry station, and his heart sank, for if the troops came it was more than likely that they would be the same men who had chased them over the ice.

While they were still discussing the situation matters came suddenly to a climax.

There was a rush of many feet on the stairs, and voices were heard calling to each other, all of which was quickly followed by a thunderous banging on the door.

"They have come!" said Mr. Pendergast. "I knew we could not escape them. May God have mercy on us! The relief these two noble young men brought to us was only temporary. Now only that door stands between us and death."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

"We are in a trap, Nat, and there is no earthly way of getting out of it that I see," said George, drawing his friend to one side. "What do you think we ought to do?"

"I'm blest if I know," replied Nat, dismally. "It looks to me very much as if we had come to the end of our rope. Here we are in a regular trap, sure enough. I only wish we had never come into the infernal place."

"There is no use in wishing that now."

"Not a bit."

"We saved these poor people from being killed up there in the joss-house, anyhow."

"Yes, but only for the moment. There's no help for us, even if they should get it. If the Russian troops come we shall be recognized, as sure as fate, and sent back to Siberia again."

It was all too true to be denied, for the thundering at the door was still kept right up, and it was surely only a question of time when the door must yield and the Chinese on the other side of it come pouring in.

All conversation had now ceased.

Most of the missionaries were on their knees praying for deliverance, and those who were not stood watching the trembling wood with gloomy faces.

It was evident that all had given up hope.

"There she goes!" cried Nat, as one of the panels of the door came crashing in.

Before George could answer the door was burst open and the mob of Chinamen were in the room.

It looked then as though the end had indeed come. Many of the Chinamen were armed with queer old swords, and there was a rush when the door first gave way, which was checked by a tall Chinaman shouting out something entirely unintelligible to the prisoners, but which George always believed prevented them all from being massacred then and there.

Immediately all hands were seized and dragged out into the snow.

Resistance was entirely useless. George found himself in the hands of two armed Celestials surrounded by a howling mob.

They were all being dragged around to the main entrance of the joss-house, and there could be little doubt that the intention was to sacrifice the entire party to the war god.

Perhaps it was so, and perhaps some other fate would have been theirs. The truth was never known, for, just as they reached the foot of the steps the blare of a bugle was heard, and a troop of forty horsemen came dashing upon the scene.

It was the Russian relief party come across the Amoor to save them.

Close behind the mounted Cossacks rode fifty or more of the

Imperial Chinese troops under the command of a young mandarin, who immediately pulled out a yellow paper and read it aloud to the mob, who listened to the imperial edict with awe.

The effect was immediate.

The prisoners were at once released and the mob slunk away, disappearing in the forest.

The missionaries were then given horses and rode under the escort of the troops to the Chinese town at the ferry.

A crossing was made here in a substantial boat, which was provided with a steel-shod prow for the purpose of breaking the ice.

Of course all this was an immense relief to every one of the little band except only to George, Nat and Lelia, who looked for nothing else than to be immediately recognized and sent back among the Siberian convicts again.

Better fortune awaited them, however. It happened that the party which had pursued them over the ice had not yet returned, and it also happened, by great good luck, that there was a party of merchants at the ferry just ready to start for Tobolsk with a load of tea, and it was determined to send the missionaries along with them, since provisions were scarce at the station, and the Russian commandant did not wish to be burdened with their support.

True to his promise, the Russian priest gave in the names of George, Nat and Lelia as members of the missionary band, and through the influence of Mr. Pendergast the others were induced to keep a still tongue.

So it worked out well, and long before the troops sent to capture the escaping convicts to the station arrived the whole party was on their way to Tobolsk, where they arrived in due time without having met with any adventure of note.

From Tobolsk an early start was made for Ekaterinburg, and fortune still favoring, the convicts there crossed the Russian frontier with the missionary band unsuspected. Here they took the train and were soon in St. Petersburg.

Lelia's danger time had now come; but by George's earnest advice she made no effort to communicate with any of her friends. They all there stuck close to the missionaries, and left it to the Rev. Mr. Pendergast to have the assumed names which they had given included in the general password which was to take the missionary band across the frontier.

Then it was Germany, and then London, where at last they were able to breathe freely.

Here Lelia decided to remain, as she had many friends among the exiled Nihilists, but George and Nat lost no time in engaging passage on the first steamer for New York, where they arrived safely ten days later, thankful enough for their fortunate escape from a living death in the Siberian mines.

As the Janeway & Jacks' combination was still abroad, George accepted another engagement, and were soon doing as well at their profession as ever.

Six months later they received in a letter from Lelia the joyful intelligence that Inavsky managed to reach the Chinese shore safely, and after many adventures got to Peking, and had then just reached London and joined his wife.

A year later George and Nat welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Inavsky in New York, from which place they went west. They were living in Chicago at last accounts.

The Zimerini Brothers are still on the stage, as everybody knows, and are reckoned the cleverest contortionists in the country.

They have not been abroad again, however, and it is doubtful if they ever do go, for both are now married, and do not care to leave the United States.

George and Nat have not forgotten those dark days in Russia, when they were arrested by mistake and sent to Siberia.

Next week's issue will contain "HAL, THE LIGHTHOUSE BOY; Or, THE MYSTERY OF RAGGED ROCKS." By Allyn Draper.

CURRENT NEWS

A. J. Dudeck, of Petoskey, Mich., has received a post-card dated June 11, 1913, announcing that a message which he tossed overboard July 7, 1909, while on the steamer President Lincoln one day out from New York, has been found on the south coast of the Isle of Anglesey, North Wales, England.

Clarence Bowman, of Vandergrift, Pa., has established a record by trapping 39 rats in one night. Procuring an iron tub, he placed it in one of their favorite haunts and partly filled it with bran, liberally feeding the rats for a few days. Then he half filled the tub with water and scattered a liberal layer of bran over this. The next morning he found the tub black with drowned rats.

Invading the cradle of the one-year-old son of John E. Copenhavor, near York, Pa., a two-foot garter snake bit the child on the neck and then closed its jaws on the nipple of the baby's nursing bottle. Peering into the cradle to see what was making the baby cry, a six-year-old brother discovered the snake, which at once ended its greedy meal and darted under a cupboard. The father was called and killed the reptile.

The honey bees near Fostoria, O., have contracted the opium habit. Like the Chinese, they get theirs from the poppy, as many residents of Fostoria grow the Oriental flowers. The bees have found this out and of late they have been leaving acres of clover blossoms to hunt out the poppy beds. They work very vigorously for an hour or so and then fall to the ground apparently as stupefied as the Chinese opium smokers after "hitting the pipe."

Only about 30,000 acres of national forest land have been burned over so far this season, according to reports to the forest service. This area is an infinitesimal proportion of the total acreage contained in the 163 forests under Federal supervision. The record encourages the hope that the fire loss this year will be small. Conditions everywhere except in the Southwest, it is said, are more than ordinarily favorable. Four fires are burning on the Coconino forest, Arizona, and during the past two weeks there have been fifty-eight fires on the national forests in Arizona and New Mexico.

The charred wreckage of an aeroplane, with the incinerated bodies of two aviators lying in the ashes, was found recently near Nonancourt, on the railroad from Paris to Granville. The dead aviators were identified as a man named Percin, who was experimenting with a new monoplane of his own invention, and his son, who had accompanied him as mechanic. Their aeroplane capsized at a height of 150 feet. It fell with a crash to the ground and the violence of the impact caused the fuel tank to explode. The aviators were pinned beneath the motor, and, being unable to extricate themselves, were burned to death.

The Navy Department has received through the Department of State a silver loving cup, which the Japanese Government desires to present to the U. S. S. Charleston. It appears that during August, 1910, there was a flood in the City of Tokio, Japan, which caused suffering and hardship among the people. The U. S. S. Charleston, in company with the U. S. S. Saratoga and U. S. S. New Orleans, was in the vicinity of Tokio at the time of the flood in that city, and the officers and men raised a fund, which was sent ashore for the relief of the sufferers. The incident had been forgotten until the receipt of correspondence from the State Department, together with the cup, in which it was stated that the Japanese Government desired to present to the Charleston the silver cup. The cup is now on its way to the Charleston, which is on our Pacific Coast, where it will be placed on exhibition and properly cared for.

One of the humblest home in Hillsdale, Mich., was made the happiest in the whole country lately when Mrs. Mary J. Welsh, who has been blind for fifty years, recovered her sight. When she was a girl of sixteen her eyes failed until she became entirely blind. In that condition she married and is the mother of eight children whom she never saw until to-day. To make her burden doubly hard, her husband became ill and she was forced to take in washing to support the family. She struggled on until her children were able to earn some money for themselves. Then things became a bit easier for her, but her sightless eyes still ached for a sight of the children. Several operations were tried and were unsuccessful. The sons, now grown up, brought the mother to Chicago, where she was taken to a hospital for treatment. Surgeons examined her and found she was suffering from a double cataract. She was discharged from the hospital, and two sons and a daughter greeted her. She was taken home to Hillsdale, where the entire family welcomed her.

Seeing that the life of Frank Hanna, a boy, of Sharon, Pa., was in danger, as he was being dragged along the road in a runaway, Frances Heanly sent her horse galloping in pursuit of the maddened horse and as she reached its side leaped on its back and brought it to a standstill. Young Hanna was not badly hurt. Hanna was driving home in a buggy when his horse ran away. In endeavoring to stop the animal he became entangled in the reins and fell from the buggy. His horse started on another spurt and the lad was being dragged along the rough road when his predicament was discovered by Miss Heanly, who was horseback riding along the road. The young woman gave pursuit and within 100 yards overtook the runaway. Steadying herself in her saddle, she leaped to the back of the runaway and after stopping him turned her attention to the boy. The buggy was not broken and she drove the boy home. The father of the lad offered the girl a reward, but she refused.

THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND

—OR—

THE HERO OF THE 7th

By J. P. RICHARDS.

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XIV. (Continued.)

"He is sleeping," he murmured, pausing, and pressing his hand to his heart. "God bless him, he is sleeping, and I am just in time to save him. Let him rest, for he is worn and weary from long nights of vigil, while I am strong and wakeful. Let him sleep, and I, who love him so, will do his duty."

It was a strange thing to see a drummer boy bend over a sleeping soldier and kiss his unconscious brow, and yet that was exactly what the pale moon and the little, glittering stars witnessed that night. Then the boy paced slowly to and fro on sentinel duty while the weary soldier slumbered peacefully on.

The drummer boy's well-shaped limbs never seemed to tire, as he went his ceaseless rounds, a smile of perfect contentment hovering about his perfect lips, and how it ever happened he could not say, but just at that moment the moon went under a cloud and darkness reigned. When he once more reached the spot where Jack Navarro sat sleeping, a sudden thrill of horror shot through his breast, for there standing directly over the unconscious soldier, his tomahawk raised above his helpless head, was an Indian chief, hideous in war-paint and feathers, a fiendish grin upon his ugly face.

For only one instant did the brave drummer boy pause, and then setting his teeth, he took deliberate aim at the redskin and fired. A wild shriek of agony rang out upon the night-air, the echoes dying away among the hills and vales, then all was very still for a few moments.

CHAPTER XV.

A HERO.

At the sound of that sharp report Jack Navarro sprang to his feet and looked about him in a dazed, bewildered manner. He could not at first understand what it all meant, but in an instant he comprehended, for there upon the ground before him with the life blood gushing in a crimson tide from a wound in his breast lay the savage, and with face whiter than it ever would be when he lay in his coffin was the messenger boy who of late had become a drummer boy of note.

"What in heaven is the matter?" the young man asked, hoarsely. "I must have fallen asleep, and you know the penalty for that? If I should be found sleeping at my post my life would pay the penalty, and you——"

"No, no, no, you were not sleeping," and the boy clasped his hands together entreatingly. "You were not sleeping, you were wide-awake, and I can prove it. Oh, for the love of heaven do not say that you were sleeping or you will be

shot for neglect of duty. Why," with a shrill, nervous laugh, "you were wide-awake when I shot the savage, and but for my interference, he would have killed you!"

Jack Navarro gave him a quick, keen glance, but before he could say anything in reply, the other sentinels who were on duty came hurrying up to him. They had all heard the sharp report of the rifle, and they wondered at it. But one look at the dusky, prostrate form lying upon the ground, told the tale, and the next moment the brave drummer boy found himself lifted upon the shoulders of the little group, while a cheer rent the very skies.

"Hurrah for the drummer of the 7th!" they all cried in chorus. "Hurrah for the bravest boy that ever struck the head of a drum!"

"Nonsense, boys!" and he struggled to get away from them. "You are foolish. I have done nothing. Any other—other man would have done the same thing. If I had not shot the Indian he would have shot Mr. Navarro, so what could I do. No, that is my mistake. He would not have shot him—he would have killed him with his tomahawk, which is a hundred times worse."

"Keep quiet, kid," they answered—"keep quiet!" We know a hero when we see one, and you are made of the right stuff. Why, Lord bless you, what are you but a mere baby boy! and yet you have more grit than a man six feet tall. You need not try to get down, for we are going to keep you here."

When the colonel heard of the drummer boy's heroic act, he sent for him to come to his private room at once. He had always admired him, yet he had at the same time looked upon him as rather a weak, timid sort of youth aside from his skill as a drummer.

"My boy, I am proud of you," he said, taking him by the hand. "I am proud of you and you are an honor to the 7th. You will yet make a great soldier."

"Thank you, sir," and the blushing youth bowed low before him; "you are more than kind. All I did was my duty. Any other—other man would have done the same."

He faltered and stammered over the word man and the sharp-eyed colonel looked at him curiously.

"You are one of the bravest boys I ever met," he said slowly. "But do you know you are more like a girl than you are like a boy."

The youth started nervously.

"I—I never thought I looked like a girl," and his voice trembled as he spoke. "No one ever said so before. It is not my fault if I do."

The bluff good-natured colonel threw back his head, laughing long and heartily.

"You amuse me with your quaint old-fashioned remarks," he said. "But I must once more tell you that you are a hero. Poor Handsome Jack! But for your bravery, he would be now lying dead. Everybody in the regiment is so fond of him, too, and had we lost him the boys would never have ceased to grieve. I never yet saw a man or a woman who did not like Jack, as for children and animals they simply go wild over him."

"I do not see how they can help liking him," the youth said, with a strange smile, "for he is certainly the kindest man I ever knew. He is as polite and courteous to the poor and lowly as the high and rich."

(To be continued)

ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST

A world's golfing record was established in the elimination play of the Western championship tournament at the Homewood Country Club, Chicago, the other day, by E. P. Allis, 3d, of Milwaukee. Allis holed out in one from the first tee, the first time in recorded annals of the game that such a feat has been accomplished at the distance—290 yards. Allis' drive was perfect, according to experts, who said the ball would not have rolled six inches further had it missed the cup.

It is reported that four large battle-cruisers are to be laid down this year in the Russian yards, and that they will be among the largest of their class in existence, each ship being of 30,000 tons displacement and driven by turbines of 75,000 horse-power. Also eight torpedo-boat destroyers of the largest size, similar in design to the "Novik," are being built, the hulls in Russia and the turbines by the Vulcan Company of Hamburg. These ships will be of 1,280 tons displacement and will be designed for 35 knots. The "Novik" made 36 knots on trial and is to-day the fastest ocean vessel afloat.

David J. Smith and William Duncan, fishermen of New Castle, Del., had an hour's fight with a man-eating shark in the middle of Delaware Bay, near Ship John Lighthouse, the other day. The two men were fishing for sturgeon, which are worth \$200 each, when they saw their net sinking, and, drawing it in, found a twelve-foot shark entangled in it. Smith thrust a large hook into the huge fish several times. The shark then tried to bite through the hull of the boat, but its teeth broke off. Smith again imbedded the hook in the fish, and it thrashed about so savagely it got away.

The downward sliding movement of the top of Mount Caroline, Switzerland, which threatened to overwhelm the village of Fleurier a couple of weeks ago, has stopped, but the people in the valley live in hourly anxiety that the millions of tons of rock and earth above them will fall upon the town. The authorities have ordered the inhabitants of the danger zone to move temporarily. Watchers have been posted on neighboring peaks, connected by improvised telephone lines, with sentinels below, to signal at any moment, day or night, the recurrence of the movement. Deep trenches are being dug at the base of the mountain in the hope of arresting the landslide, if it comes, or at least check it for a few moments.

"A considerable portion of the Atlantic fleet will be transferred to the Pacific Coast for permanent duty shortly after the opening of the Panama Canal," said Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, during a stop in Portland recently en route from Seattle to Los Angeles. "Following the opening of the Panama Canal," Mr. Daniels added, "it is my intention to accompany the At-

lantic fleet through the canal. We are planning at present to leave a considerable portion of the fleet in Pacific waters for permanent duty. Plans to this effect are being made because we consider the Pacific Coast the great frontier of America, and its development is one of the most important factors confronting the nation to-day. Facing the coast is the Orient, with its millions of people and wonderful trade possibilities. "There is more population facing the Pacific Coast than any other boundary of the nation. The importance of the Western coast has long been underestimated."

Wire-glass is said to be both burglar-proof and fire-proof. In the first case, the wire netting embedded in its center cannot, it is claimed, be broken or cut noiselessly, so that entrance by means of doors or cellar coverings of this material by thieves is rendered difficult, if not impossible. Such glass is, however, more often employed for fireproofing than for other purposes, and it enters largely into the construction of elevator doors, partitions, windows, etc. One expert, who has tested wire-glass up to 1,700 degrees Fahrenheit, keeping it at this high temperature for half an hour at a time, states that at the first rush of heat the glass crackles, but that the netting holds it together so that flames cannot pass through. It will, it seems, hold flame up to the melting-point, which is different in different kinds of glass, since some melt at 1,000 degrees and others withstand 2,000 degrees successfully. When a stream of water is turned on wire-glass that has melted almost to the running point, it immediately solidifies, so that it is a material well suited for elevator shafts, where a sudden rush of flame would crack ordinary glass and admit fire to all floors.

Much has been said with reference to the adaptations in nature to the wants of mankind. Another point of view shows the same facts as evidence that man has adapted himself to the varying conditions of life. An exception to what is regarded as a general law is found in the distribution of fishes. It is observed that in the warm waters of the Nile, for instance, fish of many kinds abound, but that they are all of poor quality. Indeed, the same might be said of the fish in all warm waters. Very few varieties, competent authorities assure us, are fit for the table. Now, it happens to be the case that in hot climates the lighter sorts of food are most in demand. The human system does not need in the tropics the meats that so largely compose the food of men in colder regions. The sending of fish from Norway to the countries about the Mediterranean is one of the oldest branches of trade in the history of commerce. Where the fish was of good quality the population was scanty, and, on the other hand, where the population was numerous the fish was poor. It seems to be a reasonable inference that both men and fish have sought the portions of the globe where the conditions of life were most favorable to them respectively.

On the Wheel for a Fortune

—OR—

The Wonderful Adventures of a Boy Bicyclist

By WILLIAM WADE.

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XV. (Continued.)

On the way they did not meet the stranger, whom they were so anxious to avoid, and at last they were in the cabin, and safe for the time at least.

Horace secured the door and hung the buffalo skin before the window. Then he turned to the rescued ones:

"Tell me all, why you were abducted, who the strange man is," he said.

"The stranger is undoubtedly insane, and I am now sure he was here, working his hidden gold mine, when Lyman Duncan, Sylvia's father, took possession of the valley and built our cabin. The mine shows that its owner has been at work in it for a long time. The strange man stole upon me as noiseless as a shadow when he abducted me. The first intimation I had of his presence was when he sprang upon me, clutched my throat, preventing my making the least sound. Then he raised me in his strong arms and carried me swiftly to his mine. There he bound me to the rocks.

"Meanwhile, he talked wildly to himself. What he said was incoherent at times and disconnected. But I gathered that he was mad, and that he feared he had come in search of his mine—that he meant to capture us one by one and finally put us to death.

"His mania seemed to take the form that every one was seeking for his mine and meant to rob him of it," replied Hester.

Then Sylvia told how she had been carried away.

She had been standing with her back to the open cabin door after Horace went to the spring, when she was seized in precisely the same way that Hester had been captured, and she too was carried away in the mad miner's arms to the hidden tunnel.

"It is good news to learn that your abductor is not leagued with Buckley, at all events," said Horace.

"But, Hester, I have something to tell you, which is proof that we are in greater peril from that villain than you yet know," he added.

"What is it? Tell me! Have you made any new discovery since I was carried away?" she asked in anxious tones.

"Yes," and Horace went on and told all about the face in the camera.

"Let me see it—the picture," requested Hester.

Horace hastened to bring the kodak picture.

Hester looked at the face of the man which was revealed in it as he peered down from the summit of the rocky wall.

And while she looked an expression of recognition came upon her face.

"I know that man!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I cannot be mistaken! He was employed at the mines of Sylvia's father by Buckley as a scout to scour the surrounding country and give warning of the approach of any strange

white men or unfriendly Indians. He was said to be one of the most cunning and experienced scouts on the border, but a lawless desperado."

"Ah, then I think we may be sure of the meaning of his presence here," said Horace, quickly.

"Yes; it must be that Buckley sent him out to search for you and Sylvia, and so we may decide that Buckley and the rest of the band of outlaws are somewhere not very far away," Hester rejoined.

After that the trio remained in the cabin until daylight came. A little later they went to the lookout rock. But each one carried a rifle. If they met the maniac they meant to protect themselves.

They reached the pass without seeing anything of the madman, and soon they gained the lofty summit which commanded such an extended view.

Scarcely had they reached the elevation when Hester pointed in the direction of the pass, and said, in low and thrilling tones:

"Look yonder! Our worst fears are realized! Buckley and his men are coming."

It was so.

Horace and Sylvia looked in the direction which Hester indicated.

And they saw a line of men on foot, coming along the narrow pass. There was a score of them. They could see their polished rifle, barrels glittering in the sunlight.

"We can only try to be brave now and defend the barricade to the last," said Hester, while Horace and Sylvia looked at the approaching enemy.

The young girl was deathly pale. She felt all the terror of her perilous situation. She realized how hopeless in the end must be the unequal strife that was to come.

Horace felt her tremble at his side.

His arm encircled her slender form and he bade her not despair.

"Hope always while there is life. The guilty do not always triumph. There is sometimes a just providence in such things," he said.

Then they hastily descended from the lookout rock.

And with rifles in hand, Horace and Hester took their places at two of the loopholes in the wall which formed the barricade.

There was still a third loophole.

After a moment Sylvia sprang to it with the rifle she had carried from the cabin, saying with a showing of desperation which the situation had awakened in her heart and banished some of her fears:

"I will not be useless. I, too, will help you hold the wall against our foes. Father taught me to use a rifle."

"Bravo, you are a little heroine!" cried Horace in admiration.

Then they became silent, while they peered through the loopholes and waited for the men they dreaded to come in sight, for they were then hidden from their view in the windings of the pass.

Almost half an hour elapsed.

Then the vanguard of the outlaw band came in sight.

And Buckley was in the front rank, while at his side the watchers behind the barricade saw the scout whose picture Horace had caught in the camera.

(To be continued)

NEWS PARAGRAPHS

With the opening of the Fall term of the public schools in Passaic, N. J., it is planned that one period during each day will be set aside for pupils to take a bath. This does not mean that the pupils will be required to take a bath every day, but there will be stipulated periods when children will be led under shower baths and given a thorough washing. This idea is being promoted by a civic organization of the city in which there are a number of leading business men and is endorsed by the Superintendent of Schools.

An explosive ten times more powerful than dynamite has been discovered. The discoverer is Prof. Darsonvill of the College of France. Important results are expected from it. Prof. Darsonvill has just made his discovery public at Leraure. The new explosive gets its force from the liquefaction of gases. It probably will be called Darsonvillite, and consists simply of a mixture of lamp black and liquid gas. Many experiments have been made with it in quarries near Paris, and it is said to have been satisfactory in every way.

To the collection of Revolutionary relics in Continental Memorial Hall, Washington, is to be added a walking stick made from one of the timbers of John Paul Jones' famous old ship the *Alliance*. The stick will be loaned to the collection by Miss Marion H. Brazier, of Boston. It was once the property of Captain U. Shillaber, who carried it on three voyages around the world on sailing ships. He willed it to his brother, who left it to Mrs. Emma S. Clement, of Newton, Mass. The cane was acquired by the John Paul Jones Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution last year.

A new type of steam ferry has lately been put in use at the port of Hamburg. It somewhat resembles a craft used in England for a few years past, and is characterized by the fact that the main deck is movable and can be raised or lowered by as much as 15 feet, the deck being strong enough to carry six large hauling wagons. The daily variations in the tide level at Hamburg made this kind of ferryboat necessary. Of 170 tons displacement, the new ferry is 120 feet long and 50 feet wide and carries triple-expansion engines giving 650 horse-power. When the boat enters the wharf, it comes into a small and completely sheltered dock.

Emulating the simians, birds and other creatures of nature, the Ardenites of Arden, Del., have taken to sleeping in the trees. Aerial bungalows are the latest innovation in this colony of single taxers and socialists, and, in consequence, there is much gossip there among the boughs at night. Frederick Whiteside and his brother were the first to affect the treetop summer home. They planned their bungalow in the midst of four tall poplars, and, after several days' work, a little bungalow, with a rustic staircase

thirty feet high leading to it, was completed. As soon as the new home in "Poplar Row" was finished, "Billy" Worthington emulated the Whitesides. Then Fielding Downs, the leader of all things musical at Arden, thought he, too, would have one, and one by one the colonists determined to slumber in the tall timber. None of those who have tried the pure oxygen treatment at night in the treetops say they want to sleep near the ground again.

War Department officials have been placed in an embarrassing position, it became known recently, by a request from agents of the French Government for the assistance of the department's ordnance bureau in perfecting the smokeless powder now used by the French army and navy. A series of unexplained disastrous explosions in the French magazines aboard ship and ashore is said to have led to this request, which is unusual in view of the consistent efforts made by most nations to protect the secret of their powder preparations. The War Department buys all of its powder under contract from an American company, and this corporation has protested vigorously against the disclosure of its trade secrets to a foreign government, asserting that, from patriotic motives, it had previously rejected overtures from this foreign government to sell it powder or to establish a powder factory in France.

Fruits are a rapidly growing factor in the foreign trade of the United States. The value of fruits and nuts passing through the Custom Houses of the United States in the fiscal year just ended approximates \$90,000,000, and is twice as great as that of a decade ago. The exports of the fiscal year 1913 amount to \$37,000,000, speaking in round terms, against \$18,000,000 in 1903, a decade earlier; and the imports approximate \$42,000,000 against \$24,000,000 in 1903. These figures do not include the trade with Hawaii and Porto Rico, which sent to continental United States over \$6,500,000 worth of fruits and nuts during the last fiscal year. Fruits exported are chiefly apples, prunes, apricots, raisins and oranges, and go largely to Europe; while those imported are chiefly bananas, lemons, olives, currants and grapes. The imports of nuts, almonds, walnuts, cocoanuts and cocoanut meat are drawn principally from the tropics. Of the \$37,000,000 worth of fruits exported during the year, apples alone amounted to about \$11,000,000 in value, of which, about \$8,000,000 were in their natural state and about \$3,000,000 dried. Europe takes the bulk of apples, both green and dried, having taken in 1912, from which period complete figures are at hand, over four-fifths of the total. England is by far the greatest purchaser of fruit in the natural state, having taken, in 1912, \$2,750,000 worth of green apples, against \$750,000 by Canada, and \$500,000 by Germany. Of the dried apples exported, Germany is the largest purchaser, having taken in 1912, \$2,333,000 worth, against \$1,125,000, by the Netherlands and \$125,000 worth by Belgium.

INTERESTING TOPICS

The United States Treasury handled in actual cash during the last fiscal year \$7,071,520,000, breaking all previous records, and exceeding the transactions of the previous year by \$469,769,000 and those of three years ago by \$1,478,826,000. Including bonds, checks and warrants the Treasury handled over \$10,000,000,000 during the year. This amount, which does not include the transactions of the sub-treasuries, was handled without the loss of a cent. The receiving teller of the Government took in over the counter \$75,353,000 during the year; the paying teller cashed \$118,177,000 in checks and warrants; the shipping teller sent out \$884,518,000, and the "change teller" made "small change" for more than \$50,000,000.

RESULTS OF THE MAWSON EXPEDITION.

The experiences and achievement of Mr. Frank Wild and his seven companions, who formed the second base of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, have just been made public. After leaving Mawson and the main party at Adelie Land, the second detachment sailed westward along the Antarctic coast, under orders to form a base on Sabrina Land or Knox Land. The former land was found not to exist, and ice prevented access to Knox Land. Finally the party was landed, with its stores, on a lofty moving glacier, which Wild thinks was mistaken by Wilkes for "Termination Land. It was named "Shackleton Glacier." From this base surveys were made all along the coast from 101 degrees east longitude, on the east, to the point reached by the German expedition of 1902 on the west, besides penetrating inward—in one place 50 miles. The main result of these explorations was the discovery of a tract of land having 350 miles of coast, and probably extending south to the pole, which the explorers named "Queen Mary's Land." On an island 65 miles west of the expedition's base was discovered the largest rookery of Emperor penguins heretofore recorded. Some 7,000 young Emperor birds were found here, besides innumerable ordinary penguins. The Mawson expedition as a whole may be said to have resulted in the accurate delineation of about 1,000 miles of new coastline.

HONESTY IN PRISONERS.

Recently a visitor to the Tombs dropped \$140, and although he was pretty sure where he had lost the money he gave up hope of getting it again. Besides, there was a repugnance to telling how careless he had been when the very surroundings should have enjoined caution upon him. Strange to relate, a prisoner found the money and duly handed it in to the warden. Seems an odd thing to many, but it is by no means unprecedented.

Once during a visit to Sing Sing a Manhattan politician in an experimental mood left his gold watch and chain on a work bench in one of the buildings where convicts were engaged in fabric work. He kept a sharp eye out, for he didn't propose to lose his watch, which had been presented

to him by admiring associates of a ward club of which he had been president. After ten minutes the politician returned and could not find his watch. He had noticed several convicts passing in and out, one of them passing quite near him. He complained of his loss to the head keeper. The convicts were lined up. One of them, the man who passed close, grinned. "Are you looking for your watch?" he asked. "I certainly am," said the politician severely. "It's in your pocket." So it was. The man who passed close had put it there. He was a clever pick-pocket. He enjoyed the laugh, and then said: "If it had only been gold." The politician retorted that it was gold. "Oh, no it isn't," said the convict. "But it was given to me by my club. It is an expensive watch." The convict grinned again. "I know the club," said he, "and I know the man they gave the money to buy it. He's up here now. He bought a pretty good watch—a fairly good one—but it's plated."

EXPLORER FINDS PYGMY TRIBE.

Captain Cecil G. Rawling, the explorer, has recently given English scientists some interesting accounts of a new tribe of pygmies, found by his expedition in southwest Dutch New Guinea.

These little people, known as the Tapiros, average 4 feet 8¾ inches in height. They were found living in the low-lying hills of the Kapare River. On the approach of the white men they ran away, but the expedition succeeded in capturing three, whose curiosity brought them near camp. At first they were greatly frightened, but kindness won them over and a few months later the explorers were enabled to establish trading relations with the tribe and were allowed to visit and stay in their village of Wombirmi. This village is hidden away in the forest high up the mountainside, and was only found after many fruitless attempts. While no open hostility was shown to the whites, they were not exactly received with open arms. Of the women and children they saw nothing, but their shrill cries could be heard as they fled up the mountainside on the approach of a stranger.

Describing the men, Captain Rawling says, taken as a whole, that they are well made and wiry, while their color is a dark chocolate. The hair, usually black, but sometimes with a touch of brown or even red, is worn short. Many grow beards, the older men dyeing theirs red. Like all native tribes, they wear necklets of animal bones and other small possessions. Their only clothing consists of a covering around the loins.

"Their houses and surroundings," says Captain Rawling, "are considerably in advance of those of their large-framed brethren of the plains. To the list of Negritos, which with the Negrillos are the known tribes of pygmies inhabiting the earth, must now be added the newly discovered tribe of Tapiros, who, so far as their stature is concerned, take rank next above the Congo pygmies."

A FEW GOOD ITEMS

The army dirigible Schuette-Lanz was completely wrecked, one soldier was killed and one fatally injured when the huge airship broke from its anchorage near Schneidemuehl the other day. The big dirigible, which is of the new type, 500 feet long, broke away from its moorings when the sun caused an expansion of the gas. Two soldiers, who were on sentry duty, rushed to the ropes when the Schuette-Lanz began to break away. As they struggled to make the ropes secure the soldiers became entangled and as the balloon arose they were carried up with it. At a height of 200 feet the men held on desperately to the ropes, but were finally shaken off. One was dead when picked up and there is no hope for the recovery of the other. The big dirigible cruised for an hour without a crew or pilot before it came down. Then it fell in a forest and was wrecked.

SEALED ALIVE IN A SOLID STONE WALL.

The identity and fate of a young girl who was walled up and left to die in a building near Barcelona, Spain, has caused the Spanish authorities to institute a rigid investigation. The affair was made public through the statement made by Esteban Gutierrez, a stonemason, who tells a thrilling story of how he was compelled, at the point of a revolver, to do the work.

Gutierrez declares that, after he had advertised in a newspaper for work, two well-dressed men called at his address and asked him to accompany them in a motor car into the country a short distance to make some urgent repairs.

Reaching a dense woods on the outskirts of the city, the two men and a chauffeur seized, bound and blindfolded the stonemason, and a few minutes later the car stopped in front of a lonely house.

The mason declares he was led inside and ordered to wall up a narrow aperture, the stone and mortar being in readiness. Gutierrez says he heard some one sobbing, and, tearing the bandage from his eyes, he saw a young girl, bound with ropes and wedged in the aperture.

He was promptly knocked down by his captors, and, when he arose was ordered to build a wall so as to enclose the girl, and when he refused was threatened with revolvers. The mason declares that, at the points of the guns, he was compelled to wall up the young girl, after which the car conveyed him to the woods several miles away, when he was unbound, given \$20 in silver and warned not to speak of the incident. Lost, he wandered several hours before he was discovered by a woodsman, and, reaching Barcelona, he went at once to the police.

AMERICAN SHOES EVERYWHERE.

What boots it if other nations of the world export their shoes? Uncle Sam certainly has a walkover everywhere he sends his own lasts. He has all countries by the heels, as it

were, when it comes to footwear to sell. American shoes are just as common in Hong Kong as they are in Piccadilly; you can buy good ones at the general store in the Australian bush or pick up a pair in Chile or Cape Town. At some far distant point Yankee shoes seem to be the sole import.

American footgear brings the highest prices in Australian cities. Shoes that fetch \$5 in New York cost \$11 there. Makes retailing in the United States at \$2.50 and \$3.50 are priced at \$6.50 and \$7.50 in the Antipodean continent. Though the tariff favors English-made shoes there by 14 per cent. and Australian-made shoes can be had from \$2.50 to \$4.50, American shoes go like hotcakes to those who can afford to pay the higher price.

Wages have gone up in Chile, and this always means an added demand for shoes. According to consular reports from Santiago, the imports of American shoes are now abnormal, especially among the better grades. No other shoe exporting country is in our class in Chile.

So it goes in Switzerland. One of the most popular imports there of American manufacture is shoes, and each year the demand is greater. The general use of motor cars, motorcycles and bicycles has rendered obsolete the heavy footwear once in vogue in Switzerland and the lighter, more comfortable, better fitting and far more stylish American shoe is supplanting home makes. Only a few years ago a rarity, now all the better class of shops in Switzerland display Uncle Sam's shoes and advertise them as "American." Only the more conservative styles were bought at first, but now the latest Broadway and Fifth avenue shapes go just as well under the shadow of the Alps as they do in the streets of skyscraping New York.

Our shoes are in brisk demand in the Netherlands and cost about 30 per cent. more than they do here. So clever are the Dutch in imitating, however, that they make their own shoes in their factories and label them "American." Poor Uncle Sam has no redress. "The reputation of American shoes in Hungary," write Deputy Consul General Kemény at Budapest, "is good and it is fashionable to wear them now." The Hungarians use about \$1,600,000 of our shoes every year and would buy more if their middlemen could get their stocks on the same terms as European houses sell.

The sale of American shoes in Budapest is in the hand of a few men who can afford to buy goods for cash. The consequence is that they make prices as high as they think people are able to pay. The pair of shoes in America for \$2.50 wholesale costs there from \$5 to \$7 retail.

In most places in France American shoes have the call. In fact, if they are designated as of Yankee make this means general excellence and the chance of a better price for the retailer. Lasts that are popular in the United States are all the go with Johnny Crapaud and even ultra fashions are to his liking. American rubber, storm slippers and sandals are also widely used.

As for London, there are plenty of shops where only Yankee shoes can be had.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, AUGUST 13, 1913.

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ITEMS OF CURRENT NEWS

United States officers, assisted by Mexican consular agents, captured the largest consignment of contraband ammunition ever taken at El Paso, Texas, when they discovered four Mexicans covering coal boxes containing 448,000 rounds of rifle cartridges in the Santa Fe Railroad yards.

All previous records of big trees discovered in Washington and Oregon forests have been eclipsed by the latest find in Snohomish County, Wash. The giant is a yellow fir, is nearly sixty-six feet in circumference at the butt and is 28 feet to the first limb, which measures 100 inches in circumference. The estimated height of the big fir is 300 feet.

Count von Zeppelin is building his largest dirigible with a view to crossing the Atlantic to the United States in the late summer. He expects to make the trip in from thirty to sixty hours' time. German warships are to be distributed along the course to assist the airship in case it is obliged to descend.

The sale of a seat on the Stock Exchange recently for \$37,000 established a new low record in the present downward movement. The highest price paid for a seat was \$95,000 in 1905. The lowest price on record since 1868 was \$2,750 in 1871. The last previous sale was at \$38,000. The following seats have been posted for transfer: Henry Coolidge to Emile de Planque and David Ives Mackie to Frederick H. Tate. It is said to have been Mr. Coolidge's seat which sold for the new low price.

The Paris fire department intends to double the capacity afforded by its present automobile fire engine, by the use of fifteen automobile fire pumps which will be of a lighter design than the ones already in use. The new engines will carry six men instead of fifteen. On the wagon truck is mounted a 100-gallon tank so as to afford an immediate water supply for the hose so that a stream can be put on the fire at once, while the connection is being made with the fire plug. This type of light engine is especially intended for fighting moderate-

sized fires during the daytime. The number of automobiles used by the chief firemen is also to be increased.

In order that all her animal pets might be cared for Mrs. Edith Rogers Gallatly, of 34 West Fifty-seventh street, New York, who died on July 17 at Westport, Conn., provided in her will, which was filed recently, that all her stock in the Paterson & Ramapo Railroad and in the Paterson & Hudson River Railroad should be used "for the joint and several benefits of such horses and dogs as I may die possessed of. The interest alone is to be used to provide the animals with a good home and the surplus, if any, to be added to the principal, and on the death of the last surviving animal to be given to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as a trust fund, the interest to be used each year to prevent cruelty to animals and provide homes for the same."

The largest grain storehouse west of the Great Lakes has just been completed at Argentine, Kan., by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad. The structure is of reinforced concrete and will hold 2,750,000 bushels of grain in 72 bins, each 79 feet high and 25 feet in diameter. During the grain season 50 men will be employed handling the bumper crops of the Middle West. Three hundred carloads of sand, 700 tons of steel, 60 carloads of stone, 20 carloads of cement and 300,000 feet of lumber were used in the construction of the bins, which rest on a foundation of 4,570 piles, 30 feet long, on top of which is a slab of concrete two feet thick. The grain is first dumped from the cars onto the boot tank, then raised to the top of the house in a belt elevator, a distance of 165 feet. Then it goes to the scales, capable of weighing a carload at a time. Belts carry the grain to the bins. There are six belts used in conveying the grain. Each is 1,100 feet long, three feet wide and three eighths of an inch thick.

George B. Cortelyou, president of the Consolidate Gas Company, of New York, stood at a silver mounted contact key three hundred feet beneath the surface of the Bronx River the other afternoon and sent an electric spark into a charge of dynamite which lifted the last stone barrier from the new Astoria tunnel. William H. Bradley, chief engineer, stood at his side. Mr. Cortelyou led a party of forty men down into the tunnel to witness the final opening. Each was clad in high top boots, rubber coats and rubber hats. As Mr. Cortelyou touched the contact key deafening echoes of the heavy blast boomed through the underground passage. Down the dimly lighted corridor a great wall of rock trembled and fell in fragments. The blast welded another link between Long Island and New York City. The Astoria tunnel, through which two gas mains, each six feet in diameter are to be laid, was begun in the summer of 1910. It lies at a depth of 246 feet, is one mile long, 21 feet high and 19 feet 9 inches wide. The Bronx shaft is at Port Morris and the Queens at Astoria. Engineers look on the Astoria tunnel as a marvelous piece of work because of difficulties overcome in the 400-foot "trouble zone," and because only two workmen lost their lives.

THE NEWS IN SHORT ARTICLES

MEXICO WELCOMES JAPANESE.

Mexico's demonstrations of friendship are pleasing but embarrassing to Japan. It is feared in Tokio that they may be misunderstood in the United States and affect the friendly relations with America. The Japanese newspapers are chagrined at the outcome of the California negotiations, but express gratification that Mexico, unlike the United States, welcomes Japanese emigrants. They point out, however, that anything in the nature of an alliance between Japan and Mexico would be impossible, as it would undoubtedly awaken suspicion that Japan was fostering bellicose designs.

A FIRE ENGINE FOR SIAM.

The King of Siam recently ordered an up-to-date fire engine, but he did not care to have it self-propelled or even provided with tongue or shafts for horse transportation, and so, although a gasoline engine is used to drive the fire pump, the machine has to be hauled to the fire by hand. Such a fire engine may strike us as ridiculous, but it is a sensible apparatus where the machine does not have to be hauled a great distance. In fact, fire engines of this type have been developed in England. One of them is employed by the Great Eastern Railway for protecting its property. It is considered hardly worth while to provide the machine with motor propulsion, as no long trips would ever be demanded of it. The fire engine, which is to be used for the protection of the royal palace at Bangkok, is fitted with a 45 to 50-horse-power, 4-cylinder engine, driving a 2-stage, 300-gallon turbine pump. The whole apparatus weighs about one ton.

THE PANAMA CANAL.

Colonel G. W. Goethals, chief engineer in charge of the construction of the Panama Canal, has notified Lieutenant Colonel David du B. Gaillard, chief of the central division of the canal, that steam shovel work in the Culebra Cut section will hereafter be conducted on the assumption that the Gamboa Dike will be dynamited on October 10. While it had previously been announced that this dynamiting would take place after October 1, this is the first time the actual date has been named. The destruction of the dike will allow the Gatun Lake to flood the cut, thereby practically connecting the Atlantic and Pacific, although actual navigation of the canal probably will not be attempted for some time thereafter. Excavation in the cut henceforth will be confined mainly to removing the remaining hard rock sections between Cucaracha slide and Empire, a distance of one mile.

BASEBALL IN JAPAN.

All Japan is showing a growing interest in baseball, which is fast becoming the national sport of the country. Count Okuma, the veteran statesman; Baron Sakatani, Mayor of Tokio, and others equally prominent have thrown the opening balls at a number of contests, including those between the nines from Leland Stanford University, Cali-

fornia, and the nine from Kelo and Meiji universities of Japan. When the Stanford boys were visiting Osaka, Toshitake Okubo, Governor of the Prefecture, personally opened the series.

Governor Okubo is a brother of the present Foreign Minister, Baron Makino, and is a Yale man. He says he was one of the first players of baseball in Japan, which was played, as early as 1885 in Tokio, introduced by Americans in the employ of the Government. Mr. Okubo names a number of prefectural Governors and Ministers of State as his old playmates. "At Yale," he declared, "I was an enthusiastic fan."

Baseball is not confined to the universities of Japan. There is no professional league, but athletic organization in various parts of the empire have formed nines and the public is enthusiastic in support.

The Stanford players were greatly impressed with the skill of the Japanese players, and declared that baseball, although peculiarly an American game, is admirably adapted to the Japanese, who are quick in their movements and quick thinkers on the diamond.

FORTUNE IN A MICHIGAN LAKE.

Gull Lake is one of the prettiest lakes in Michigan, and has more cottages than any other, there being over 300, some of them palatial residences with modern improvements, owned by folks not only of Michigan, but also from Southern States.

Thousands of walnut logs, a wood now of almost priceless value, lie hidden in fathoms of water. No one knows the exact spot, as the man who held the secret died several years ago.

Gull Lake was not always the imposing body of water it now is. In the last sixty years the lake has risen approximately twenty feet. James Phillips, who carried the mail, says he could walk across to the island forty-five years ago. On the west side of the lake there was a large walnut grove. A changed course of the lake caused this grove to become inundated with about eighteen feet of water. In the winter the water froze, breaking off the trees.

A man named Hawk brought the steamer Crystal to the lake, and these stumps in the water made him go around the east side of the lake, three-quarters of a mile out of his way. Hawk rigged up a saw and spent a whole summer sawing off these logs five feet under the water. This caused such a sensation that he made money carrying passengers who came from all over the State.

About nine years ago Captain Frank Dutcher took the job of pulling the stumps out of the lake. In some cases it was necessary to use dynamite. The logs were taken into deep water and sunk. Every year stumps are seen floating just below the surface of the water, but the majority of them are on the bottom, waterlogged, but in good condition. As the lake is 300 feet deep in some places and no one knows where to begin the search, they will likely stay there for several years.

ITCH POWDER.



Gez whiz! What fun you can have with this stuff. Moisten the tip of your finger, tap it on the contents of the box, and a little bit will stick. Then shake hands with your friend, or drop a speck down his back. In a minute he will feel as if he had the seven years' itch. It will make him scratch, rear, squirm and make faces. But it is perfectly harmless, as it is made from the seeds of wild roses. The horrible itch stops in a few minutes, or can be checked immediately by rubbing the spot with a wet cloth. While it is working, you will be apt to laugh your suspender buttons off. The best joke of all. Price 10 cents a box, by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

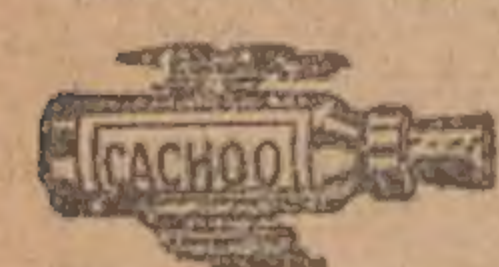
GOOD LUCK BANKS.



Ornamental as well as useful. Made of highly nicked brass. It holds just One Dollar. When filled it opens itself. Remains locked until refilled. Can be used as a watchcharm. Money refunded if not satisfied. Price, 10c. by mail.

L. Senarens, 347 Winthrop St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

CACHOO OR SNEEZING POWDER.



The greatest fun-maker of them all. A small amount of this powder, when blown in a room, will cause everyone to sneeze without anyone knowing where it comes from. It is very light, will float in the air for some time, and penetrate every nook and corner of a room. It is perfectly harmless. Cachoo is put up in bottles, and one bottle contains enough to be used from 10 to 15 times. Price, by mail, 10c. each; 3 for 25c. WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

X-RAY WONDER



This is a wonderful little optical illusion. In use, you apparently see the bones in your hand, the hole in a pipe-stem, the lead in a pencil, etc. The principle on which it is operated cannot be disclosed here, but it will afford no end of fun for any person who has one. Price, 15 cents each, by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

THE SWIMMING FISH



Here is a fine mechanical toy. It is an imitation goldfish, about 4 1/2 inches long, and contains a water-tight compartment which will not allow it to sink. To keep it in a natural position, the lower fin is ballasted with lead. To make it work, a spring is wound up. You then throw it in the water, and the machinery inside causes the tail to wiggle, and propel it in the most lifelike manner. When it runs down the fish floats until it is recovered, and it can then be rewound. Races between two of these fishes are very interesting. Price, 25 cents each by mail, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

LAUGHABLE EGG TRICK



This is the funniest trick ever exhibited and always produces roars of laughter. The performer says to the audience that he requires some eggs for one of his experiments. As no spectator carries any, he calls his assistant, taps him on top of the head, he gags, and an egg comes out of his mouth. This is repeated until six eggs are produced. It is an easy trick to perform, once you know how, and always makes a hit. Directions given for working it. Price, 25 cents by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

CARTER AEROPLANE No. 1.



Will fly on a horizontal line 150 feet! Can be flown in the house, and will not injure itself nor anything in the room. The most perfect little aeroplane made. The motive power is furnished by twisted rubber bands contained within the tubular body of the machine. It is actuated by a propeller at each end revolving in opposite directions. Variation in height may be obtained by moving the planes and the balance weight. It can be made to fly either to the right or the left by moving the balance side-wise before it is released for flight. Price, 35c. each, delivered.

L. Senarens, 347 Winthrop St., Brooklyn, N. Y.



**Sure Fire
Accuracy
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The World's
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Remington-UMC .22 cal. cartridges have broken two records in two years.

The present world's 100-shot gallery record, 2484 ex 2500, held by Arthur Hubalek was made with these hard hitting .22's.

They will help you, too, to break your best shooting records.

Remington-UMC .22's are made, too, with hollow point bullets. This increases their shocking and killing power.

Remington-UMC—the perfect shooting combination

REMINGTON ARMS-UNION METALLIC CARTRIDGE CO.

299 Broadway, New York City

THE BUGHOUSE PUZZLE.



It is the most mystifying puzzle ever invented, and consists of 14 pieces of metal, packed in a neat little box. With them you can form a checker board—that is, if you know how. The trick is to do it, and a tougher job you never tackled. Several other interesting combinations are possible. Get a box and see how many you can do. Price 12 cents each, by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

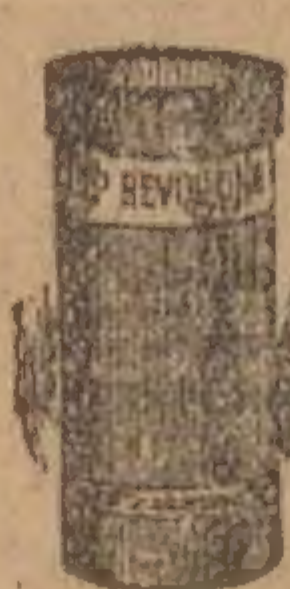
WHISTLEPHONE



This is one of the greatest musical instruments ever invented. It is made entirely of metal and is almost invisible when in use. With it, in a few moments, you can learn to play all kinds of tunes. Have lots of fun, please and amuse your friends and make some money, too. Fine for either song or piano accompaniment or by itself alone. You place the whistlephone in the mouth with half circle out, place end of tongue to rounded part and blow gently as if to cool the lips. A few trials will enable one to play any tune or air.

Price 3 cents each by mail, post-paid
H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

BLACK-EYE JOKE.



New and amusing joker. The victim is told to hold the tube close to his eye so as to exclude all light from the back, and then to remove the tube until pictures appear in the center. In trying to locate the pictures he will receive the finest black-eye you ever saw. We furnish a small box of blackening preparation with each tube, so the joke can be used indefinitely. Those not in the trick will be caught every time. Absolutely harmless. Price by mail 15c. each; 2 for 25c.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

Ayvad's Water-Wings



Learn to swim by one trial

Price 25 cents, Postpaid

These water-wings take up no more room than a pocket-hankerchief. They weigh 8 ounces and support from 50 to 250 pounds. With a pair anyone can learn to swim or float. For use, you have only to wet them, blow them up, and press together the two ring marks under the mouthpiece.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

TOBACCO HABIT

You can conquer it easily in 8 days. Improve your health, prolong your life. No more stomach trouble, no foul breath, no heart weakness. Regain manly vigor, calm nerves, clear eyes and superior mental strength. Whether you chew, or smoke pipe, cigarettes, cigars, get my interesting Tobacco Book. Worth its weight in gold. Mailed free. E. J. WOODS, 534 Sixth Ave., 228 C. New York, N. Y.

Wizard Repeating LIQUID PISTOL



Will stop the most vicious dog (or man) without permanent injury.

Perfectly safe to carry without danger of leakage. Fires and recharges by pulling the trigger. Loads from any Liquid. No cartridges required. Over six shots in one loading. All dealers, or by mail, 50c. Pistol with rubber covered holster, 55c. Holsters separate, 10c. Send money order. No postage stamps or coins accepted. PARKER, STEARNS & CO., 273 GEORGIA AVE., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

NOISY HANDKERCHIEF.



A great deal of amusement may be had with this little article. It imitates the blowing of the nose exactly, except that the noise is magnified at least a dozen times, and sounds like the bass-horn in a German band. This device is used by simply placing it between the teeth and blowing. The harder the blow the louder the noise. Price, 10c. each by mail, postpaid. WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

THE AUTOPHONE.



A small musical instrument that produces very sweet musical notes by placing it between the lips with the tongue over the edge, and blowing gently into the instrument. The notes produced are not unlike those of the flute and flute. We send full printed instructions whereby anyone can play anything they can hum, whistle or sing, with very little practice. Price, 10c.; 3 for 25c., mailed, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.



ELECTRIC PUSH BUTTON.—The base is made of maple, and the center piece of black walnut, the whole thing about 1 1/4 inches in diameter, with a metal hook on the back so that it may be slipped over edge of the vest pocket. Expose to view your New Electric Bell, when your friend will push the button expecting to hear it ring.

As soon as he touches it, you will see some of the liveliest dancing you ever witnessed. The Electric Button is heavily charged and will give a smart shock when the button is pushed. Price 10c., by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

LITTLE RIF'S TEN-PINS.



In each set there are ten pins and two bowling balls, packed in a beautifully ornamented box. With one of these miniature sets you can play ten-pins on your dining-room table just as well as the game can be played in a regular alley. Every game known to professional bowlers can be worked with these pins. Price, 10c. per box by mail, postpaid.

N. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

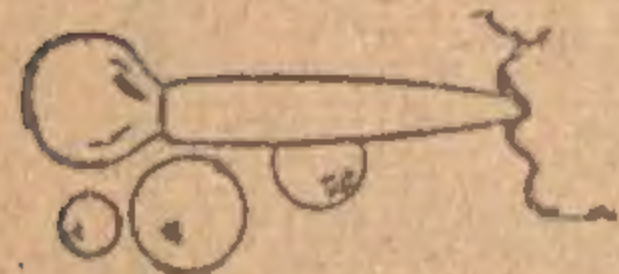
DUPLEX BICYCLE WHISTLE.



This is a double whistle, producing loud but very rich, harmonious sounds, entirely different from ordinary whistles. It is just the thing for bicyclists or sportsmen, its peculiar double and resonant tones at once attracting attention. It is an imported whistle, handsomely nickel plated, and will be found a very useful and handy pocket companion. Price, 10c.; 3 for 25c.; one dozen, 75c., sent by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

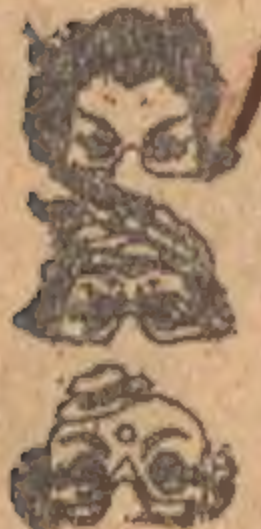
BUBBLE BLOWER.



With this device, a continuous series of bubbles can be blown. It is a wooden, cigar-shaped blower, enclosing a small vial, in which there is a piece of soap. The vial is filled with water, and a peculiarly perforated cork is inserted. When you blow in to the mouthpiece, it sets up a hydraulic pressure through the cork perforations and causes bubble after bubble to come out. No need of dipping into water once the little bottle is filled. Price, 10c. each by mail, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

HALF MASKS.



False-faces beaten a mile! There are 7 in a set and represent an Indian, a Japanese girl, a clown, Foxy Grandpa, an English Johnny Atkins and an Automobile. Beautifully lithographed in handsome colors on a durable quality of cardboard. They have eyeholes and string perforations. Price, 6c. each, or the full set of 7 for 25c., postpaid.

M. V. GALLIGAN, 419 W. 56th St., N. Y.

MYSTIC PUZZLE



The newest and most novel puzzle on the market. It consists of a flat piece of wood 1 1/2 x 3 inches, neatly covered with imitation leather. The cross-bar and ring in the hole are nickel-plated. The object is to get the small ring off the bar. It absolutely cannot be done by anyone not in the secret. More fun to be had with it than with any other puzzle made. It is not breakable and can be carried in the vest pocket.

Price 10 cents each by mail, post-paid

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

TABLE RAISING TRICK



The most mystifying trick ever done by a magician! The performer shows a plain light table. He places his hand flat upon its top. The table clings to his hand as if glued there. He may swing it in the air, but the table will not leave his hand until he sets it on the floor again. The table can be inspected to show that there are no strings or wires attached.

Price 12 cents each, by mail, post-paid

M. V. GALLIGAN, 419 W. 56th St., N. Y.

MUSICAL SEAT



The best joke out. You can have more fun than a circus, with one of these novelties. All you have to do is to place one on a chair seat (hidden under a cushion, if possible). Then tell your friend to sit down. An unearthly shriek from the little round drum will send your victim up in the air, the most puzzled and astonished mortal on earth. Don't miss getting one of these genuine laugh producers. Perfectly harmless, and never misses doing its work.

Price 20 cents each, by mail, post-paid

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

JAPANESE WATER FLOWERS



Without exception, the most beautiful and interesting things on the market. They consist of a dozen dried-up sprigs, neatly encased in handsomely decorated envelopes, just as they are imported from Japan. Place one sprig in a bowl of water, and it begins to exude various bright tints. Then it slowly opens out into various shapes of exquisite flowers. They are of all colors of the rainbow. It is very amusing to watch them take form.

Small size, price 5 cents; large size, 10 cents a package, by mail, postpaid.

M. V. GALLIGAN, 419 W. 56th St., N. Y.

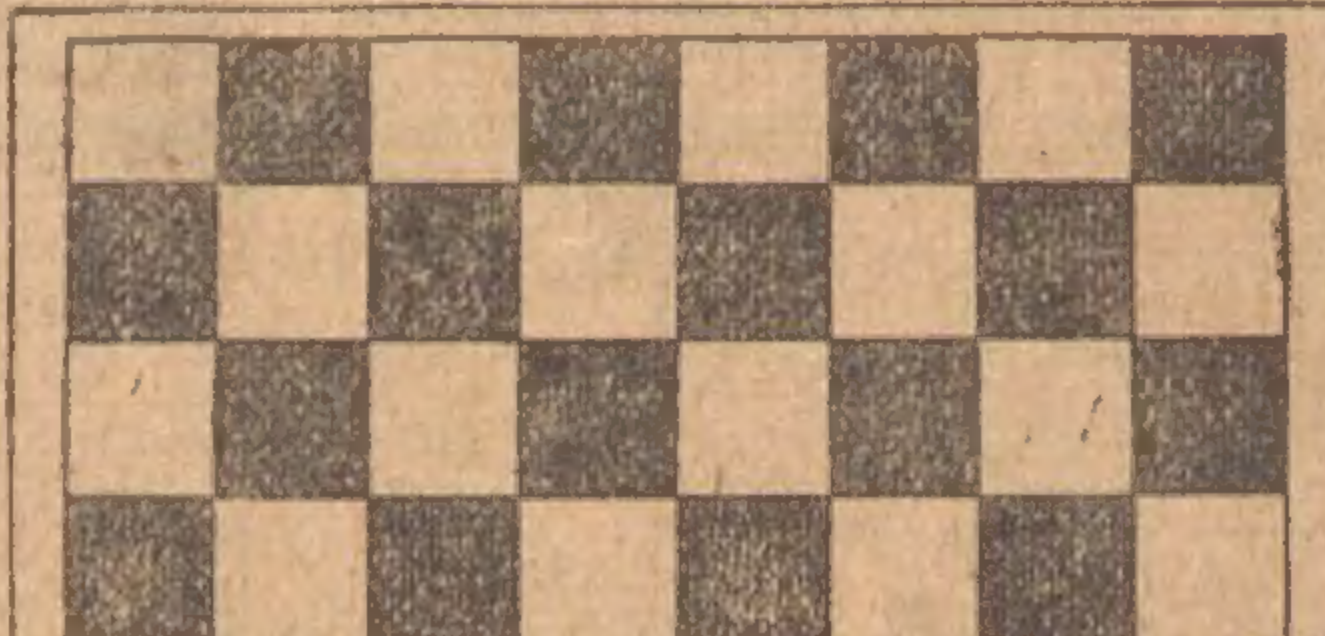


HUMANATONE.

The improved Humanatone. This flute will be found to be the most enjoyable article ever offered; nickel plated, finely polished; each put up in a box with full instruction how to use them. Price, 18c., postpaid.

NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

LITTLE CHECKER BOARDS.



Price 7 cents each by mail. They are made of durable colored cardboard, fold to the size of 6 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches, and are so handy in size that they can be carried in the pocket. They contain 24 red and black checkers, and are just as serviceable as the most expensive boards made. The box and lid can be fastened together in a moment by means of patent joints in the ends. Full directions printed on each box.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

DOUBLE CLAPPERS



They are handsomely made of white wood, 6 inches long, with carefully rounded edges. On each side a steel spring is secured, with flat leaden discs at the ends. They produce a tremendous clatter, and yet they can be played even better than the most expensive bones used by minstrels. The finest article of its kind on the market. Price 7 cents a pair, postpaid.

M. V. GALLIGAN, 419 W. 56th St., N. Y.

THE FLUTTER-BY.



This mechanical flying machine is worked by a new principle. It looks like a beautiful butterfly, about 9 inches wide. In action its wing movements are exactly like those of a live butterfly. It will travel through the air about 25 feet, in the most natural manner. As flying toys are all the rage, this one should be a source of profit and amusement to both old and young. Price, 18c. each by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

LIGHTNING TRICK BOX.



A startling and pleasing illusion! "The ways of the world are devious," says Matthew Arnold, but the ways of the Lightning Trick Box when properly handled, are admitted to be puzzling and uncertain. You take off the lid and show your friends that it is full of nice candy. Replace the lid, when you can solemnly assure your friends that you can instantly empty the box in their presence without opening it; and taking off the lid again, sure enough the candy has disappeared. Or you can change the candy into a piece of money by following the directions sent with each box. This is the neatest and best cheap trick ever invented.

Price, only 10c.; 3 for 25c., mailed, postpaid.

M. V. GALLIGAN, 419 W. 56th St., N. Y.

FIFFI.



Also known as a Japanese butterfly. A pleasing novelty enclosed in an envelope. When the envelope is opened Fiffi will fly out through the air for several yards. Made of colored paper to represent a butterfly six inches wide.

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